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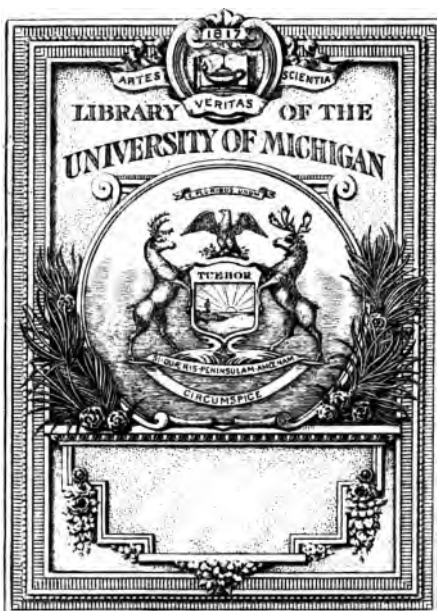
IN SPITE OF THE HANDICAP

JAMES D. CORROTHERS



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IN SPITE OF THE HANDICAP



IN SPITE OF THE HANDICAP

IN SPITE OF THE HANDICAP



James H. Brothers

IN SPITE OF THE HANDICAP

An Autobiography

BY
JAMES D. CORROTHERS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
RAY STANNARD BAKER

Associate Editor of
The American Magazine



NEW YORK
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
the memory of noble lives
that touched and bettered mine

English
White
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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT two years ago, the author of this autobiography, Mr. James D. Corrothers, sent me the manuscript of an unusual short story called "At the End of the Controversy," dealing vividly with certain aspects of the Negro problem in America. It was afterwards published in the *American Magazine*. I had known something of his work before as a contributor of excellent verse to *The Century* and other magazines.

Mr. Corrothers now gives us, in this autobiography, not only a real contribution to our knowledge of all those complex conditions which confront the colored man in America, but a downright interesting and well-written human document. It is an unusual book in several ways. The problems of the southern Negro are pretty well known: but this book by a northern Negro gives us a striking picture of what race-prejudice means in the North, and the difficulties which the Northern Negro is forced to meet. It also throws much light on conditions with which few writers on the race question have dealt: I mean the problems which confront the abler and more intelligent Negroes,

Introduction

the leaders of the race, in their contact with *their own people*. Mr. Corrothers recognizes that the color-line is only a part, however important, of the great human situation which the Negro must face. And finally it is a book singularly without rancor: the book of a man who in spite of difficulties has maintained a cheerful and helpful outlook toward life.

James D. Corrothers is of Scotch-Irish, Indian and Negro stock. He was born in the Negro settlement of Cass County, Michigan, educated at Northwestern University and elsewhere and has had a varied and adventurous experience both in the North and in the South. He has been engaged in many sorts of work, from blacking boots to preaching the gospel—and writing poetry. He has been able, in an unusual way, to try out the chances of the colored man in our American civilization. He has had the faculty of making interesting friends. Henry D. Lloyd, the author of “Wealth Against Commonwealth,” was one of the first men to recognize his ability and to help him with his education. Miss Frances E. Willard was for years his friend and helper. The glimpses he gives in this autobiography of Frederick Douglass, Paul Laurence Dunbar and other well-known Negroes are especially interesting, for they give an impression of these men as seen from the inside, by one of their own race.

Introduction

This is a book calculated to awaken among its readers, whether white or colored, that understanding and sympathy which must be the basis of every honest effort to solve those complicated problems which have grown up around the color line in America.

RAY STANNARD BAKER.

Amherst, Mass.

July, 1915.

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A DIFFICULT START

CHAPTER I

A DIFFICULT START

IN 1836 or '38, perhaps, at about the period when Abraham Lincoln was beginning a modest law practice in Springfield, Illinois, some Quaker abolitionists established an "Underground Railroad station," or hiding-place for escaping Negro slaves, in the lower peninsula of Michigan. The location they selected was an almost inaccessible region in Cass county, bordering northern Indiana, and was then known only to hunters and trappers and a few nearby, white settlers. It was called "The Chain Lake Region" because of the beautiful chain of little lakes which it embraced. Fugitive slaves and a few free Negroes who reached this part of Michigan in the early "'40's," liked "The Chain Lake Region" and settled there; and, defying capture or molestation, remained and prospered. They felled the forests, drained the swamps, laid out roads, and named the water-courses. They called their colony "The Chain Lake Settlement," and it is so known to-day. In the course of a few years they established schools, and imitated, as best they could,

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the government of white men. In a quiet way, this unique Negro colony in the North had become somewhat known even prior to the Civil War.

In 1847, a white Virginian named Saunders, becoming convinced that slavery was wrong, set his coloured people free, and brought them out to Michigan. In "Chain Lake Settlement" he bought a splendid tract of land nearly one mile square, gave all his people homes, and spent his remaining years among them. Other masters in Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee also freed all or a part of their slaves, sometimes the old and infirm ones; sometimes, the incorrigibles. These, with free Negroes from Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, continued to swell the population of the Settlement. Most of these people had helped to make the fortunes of their former masters. Now they were eager to accumulate something for themselves and their posterity.

The descendants of these pioneer Negroes still possess the land in "Chain Lake Settlement." Their community embraces all of "Calvin township," 36 square miles; and a portion of "Porter township," about two and a half square miles. Cassopolis, the thriving county-seat, eight miles from the Settlement, is the principal market and trading point for "Chain Lake" folk, many of whose farms consist of from 90 to 800 acres. Good roads, modern cottages, with

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roses blooming in the yards; great barns, windmills, schools, churches, country stores and telephones are common to their community. The late Dr. Booker T. Washington has visited the Settlement, and has referred to it as "a remarkable example of Negro colonization in the North."

The six lakes which give the Settlement its name lie wholly within it. They are from one to three miles long, and the whole chain is so linked by tiny rivulets that one may pass in a boat from lake to lake, through the entire system. Three of the lakes still bear the names of coloured men. The whole system empties finally into "Christy Ann creek" which flows into the St. Joseph river, which, in turn, empties into Lake Michigan, forty miles from the chain of lakes. It was in this Settlement that I was born, July 2, 1869; and there my mother whom I have never seen (because she died one hour after I was born) sleeps in "Chain Lake Graveyard" which, from a lonely hill, looks down upon the black waters of the little lake where the chain of lakes is born.

My relatives were not among the early pioneers of the Settlement. They came into it from Ohio shortly before I was born. When I was two years old our family removed further north into Van Buren county, settling in the vicinity of South Haven. This was most fortunate for me. For there, being the only

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coloured boy in the public schools, I grew up in an atmosphere of pure speech and enjoyed advantages of superior training. I have never talked Negro dialect, nor done plantation antics. My speech and ways were those of the white community about me. This is true of practically every coloured writer who has attained any particular degree of success in America: Dunbar, Chestnutt, Du Bois, Braithwaite and Phyllis Wheatley were all creatures of a Northern environment somewhat like my own.

Yet, as a public man and a minister, I have often regretted my lack of early contact with the masses of my race. I have been at the disadvantage of having to learn their moods and methods of thought by experience, and as an observer, instead of knowing these things intuitively, as one would who grew up among them. The unschooled Negro, when he premeditates church meannesses, either talks in riddles or assumes a sullen, enigmatic manner quite difficult for me to fathom. Often I have envied the reassuring confidence of the old plantation preacher who announced, upon taking charge of his new flock: "Chil-luns, you cain't fool me; 'ca'se I has good, bo'n undahstan'in' o' mah people: When a niggah sneeze, *I knows whah he cotch his col'.*"

I do not always know. Not immediately.

My father, I have been told, gave me, at my birth,

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to his father to rear. A few years afterward he remarried, and decided that he wanted me back; and there was, during several years of my boyhood, much disputing and bitter feeling in our family over the possession of me. Grandfather finally decided to settle the matter by having me taken to the poor-house in Van Buren county, and letting me remain there as a state charge for a period of forty-eight hours. He then legally adopted me as his son. But, notwithstanding the supposed protection of this rather unique legal triumph, down in my heart there still lurked a fear lest my father might yet succeed in spiriting me off to his home which, at that time, was buried deep in a Michigan forest, where I very well understood I should have almost no opportunity to be educated. I was, moreover, devotedly attached to my grandfather.

My father had been a Union soldier, and there was still, in those days, not a little of the soldier's temper and roughness about him. He was a man of unusual physical strength, and my mind was early filled with such awesome tales of his prowess and exploits that at the sight of him I would run away and hide. I had seen him miss a man, and split a great board with his fist once, when angry; and white people had told me they had seen him lift with ease an engine wheel weighing 1400 pounds.

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Once an aunt, my father's sister, learning that I was about to be taken, slipped away with me into the deep woods where, lying down beside a fallen tree, we covered ourselves with leaves and remained in hiding all night. The next morning we crossed a deep river, through the aid of some friendly white people, and remained in hiding among them several weeks. It was not until I had attained manhood, and had really become *acquainted* with my father, that I knew he had never intended to harm a hair in my head; but had acted, determinedly, within what he considered a parent's natural right. Yet, it was, without doubt, inestimably to my advantage that I could remain with my grandfather, within a short walk of a public school in Michigan.

South Haven was, in those days, a tiny lumber town and lake port in Michigan, about eighty miles northeast from Chicago, across the lake. It was also a fruit-growing center, being located in the famous "Michigan Fruit-Belt." In those days, that part of Michigan was pretty rough, as all newly settled communities are. People loved fisticuffs. Being the only coloured boy in the village, I had to thrash nearly every white boy in town before I was allowed to go to school in peace. Often, during my first months in school, I was soundly flogged by the teachers and deprived of my recesses, sometimes, I felt, quite un-

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justly. But this did not affect my determination to go to school. Such whippings as the teachers administered to me—properly or otherwise—I took, and came back the next day with my books. I was soon leading most of my classes, and the teachers were plainly interested in helping me forward. The boys, too, soon accepted me as a playfellow. I had harboured no resentment against them or the teachers. I was simply “*new*” among them, and they had to get used to me. Some of the teachers, like the children, had, perhaps, never seen a coloured boy before.

Grandfather and I lived alone together. We were very poor. Such luxuries as white sugar, coffee and tea we never had, but substituted for these “sassafras root,” which we dug from the ground; and brown sugar. We mended our own shoes, and sometimes burned “driftwood” which we picked up from the lake beach. I never possessed an overcoat nor wore underwear until I began to support myself. I never had a new suit of clothing nor a single toy in all my boyhood; and I never wore “knee pants” in my life. My clothing consisted of Grandfather’s old garments, turned wrong-side-out and cut down by him to as near my size as he could guess. In the fall and winter, as the weather grew colder, I put on additional clothing until, sometimes, I was wearing three and four suits at once. This was a common practice even

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among the white boys out there in those times. But I was, without doubt, the most bepatched boy in the town. Nevertheless, I was healthy and happy, and as well, if not better, read than most boys of my age in the village.

Grandfather was devoutly religious. Never a morning or evening but we had prayers, read scripture and sang a hymn. He could not legibly write his own name, nor correctly spell it; and his reading was crude and laborious: "A-n-d, and; t-h-e, the; L-o-r-d, Lord." *That* was the way of it. But with what meaning and earnestness. He was a man much beloved by both white and coloured people of the community for his kindness of heart, industry and honesty. I do not think he had an enemy in the village. The children, especially, loved him. He had no Negro blood whatever, being Scotch-Irish and Indian, but, having married a coloured woman, my grandmother, he was identified with the race. Through his father, he was descended from "The House of Carruthers" (I "made up" *my* spelling of the name when a boy) of Dumfries, Scotland. His mother was a Cherokee Indian woman. He had been a great hunter and traveller. The boys of the village loved to hear his tales. He had visited South America, Cuba, Hayti, Mexico and Canada; and had been in nearly all our states and territories, and had fought Indians. He had been mar-

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ried four times, and had outlived all his wives. My grandmother, his second wife, was a black woman of the Zulu race. My mother had considerable French blood from her mother, but her father was a black man whose ancestors were from Madagascar. Madecasse blood is easily distinguishable among coloured people by certain characteristics, such as nearly Caucasian features and almost straight, black hair. My maternal grandfather, I am told, was in unusual demand as a country fiddler.

There were only two coloured people in our town, when I was a boy, who could read a newspaper. Of these I happened to be one. The other was a young man named "Jim" Green whom the Union soldiers brought back from the South, a little boy, at the close of the war. The best white families in town had "brought him up," and he clerked in a large drygoods store. He was quite an aristocrat. I always felt thankful if he even spoke to me.

Sometimes, on Sunday afternoons, Green would read the *Chicago Times* or the *Inter Ocean* to a group of coloured people about him. At other times this proud duty devolved upon me. I distinctly remember how, when the news did not appear to satisfy my hearers, I would add an occasional phrase or sentence to suit their ideas, or set them laughing. Nobody

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dreamed that, a few years afterward, I would be "doing space" (reporting) on those very papers.

There were some very remarkable Negro characters in Michigan in my early boyhood. They were the product and antidote of the peculiar conditions of those times. The Negroes had but recently been emancipated, and the North was not used to them. In several small towns in Michigan and Indiana they were not allowed to live; in some they might not even remain over night, purchase food, nor obtain a drink of water. The unfortunate Negro who unwittingly entered such a community was first made to sing and dance, then given a few kicks and cuffs and told to "trot." And forthwith he "trotted." No second intimation was ever necessary.

One of the strange characters whose physical prowess did much to change these conditions was Dave Adly, a sort of larger black Fitzsimmons who called himself "The Black Tiger." He was not like other men, but seemed a sort of physical "left-over" from the days of primal man. He had a strength not common to men, and loved nothing so much as an opportunity to prove it. He was double-jointed, long-armed and gorilla-chested; and, when angry, roared like an animal. The fame of this unusual man spread all over lower Michigan, Indiana and portions of Ohio; and, in spots, along the upper Mississippi. Whenever Adly heard of a



Here I was ten or eleven years old. Some of Grandfather's
"guess-work" tailoring is shown. With me is an Aunt.



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town where coloured men had been made to dance and run, he went there and gave them a chance to try the same thing on him. The usual result was that the next Negro who happened along was let strictly alone. When aroused, Adly was a battle-glaring demon upon whom showers of stones and clubs seemed to have no other effect than to increase his inhuman rage. His favourite weapon was a small man whom he might use as a club upon a score of astonished antagonists. A man who foolishly drew a pistol, once, to shoot him had his arm snapped in a twinkling, and for hours afterward lay stunned and bleeding from the effect of a terrible blow from Adly's open hand. For, in his *mêlées*, Adly seemed omniscient and invincible, and always emerged from them triumphant and vainglorious.

There was a *reason* for such Negroes as he: Certain slave owners had bred Negroes carefully and skilfully, like blooded draft-horses, to produce superhumanly powerful working machines. Adly was a "working machine" gone wrong. I have personally seen Adly who is, of course, long since dead. He was quite an old man when I was a boy.

There were several other Negroes, somewhat of the Adly type, though less powerful—such men as "Blood" Tyler and the seven Howard brothers, cousins of Tyler—who were well known for their exploits in

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lower Michigan and Indiana during my early boyhood; but they and the well-nigh unthinkable conditions under which coloured people were sometimes made to suffer in the North and Middle West have passed away, and there is no need to relate mere details concerning them. My purpose has been honestly to set down something of the actual conditions into which I was born, "in the free North," a little more than forty years ago. *The North was not used to coloured people.*

I recall an amusing experience of my boyhood which may serve to illustrate this statement: Once, in passing a white farmer's house a few miles out of South Haven, the farmer accosted me with: "Say, little boy, just you wait in the road there a minute. My little boy never saw a *coloured* boy, and I don't want him to miss this chance."

I waited, obligingly.

Soon a bright little boy of about eight years came out of the house, his eyes fairly popping with astonishment.

"What makes your face so dirty, little boy?" he asked, curiously.

"I'm not *dirty*; I'm *coloured*," I informed him. "*God* made me this colour," I said.

"Well, can't you wash it off?"

"No," I explained, "*I'll always be this way.*"

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His last shot was: "*How can you tell when your face is dirty?*"

The first mobbing of Negroes of which I ever heard did not occur in the South, but in Michigan; and in the town where I was raised. It happened in this way:

A great Fourth of July celebration was being given in our little town, and a number of excursions poured into it, by boat and train, from Chicago, Kalamazoo and other points, swelling the population of the little town from its normal size of 1200 to perhaps 10,000 or more, for the day. But to the credit of South Haven let it be said that the trouble was started by sailors and visiting strangers, and not by the citizens of the town.

It was a mere trifle that started the trouble: A bit of fisticuffs between a coloured boy from Kalamazoo and a white boy from the country. This grew into a general fracas between the friends of the two boys, and developed into a race riot in which Negroes were beaten and chased, like rabbits. Soon the triumphant whites were running, like madmen, through the streets, yelling:

"Fifty cents for a nigger! A dollar for a nigger! Five dollars for a nigger! Just one more *nigger!*"

Negroes hid in the woods; in graveyards, and under

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sidewalks, or ran past the depot toward which, in panic fear, their flight had been directed. Some burrowed into the ground, and hid there for days. One Negro barber, who was quite a linguist and a dandy, was knocked, swearing, down a flight of stairs; another Negro was chased into the river; another, a comical old fellow by the name of Reuben Berry, was found eating pie in a restaurant, and was pretty badly smashed and kicked about. "Reuben didn't want no mo' pie!" he declared afterward. That no one was killed in this riot seems almost miraculous. But a number of coloured people were severely beaten and scarred for life. I was personally not molested, though I was in the streets at the time. None of my relatives were hurt by the rioters whose anger appeared to be principally directed against the members of the gaudily uniformed coloured band from Kalamazoo, several of whom at first defied the whites, but, later, fled for their lives.

The little town has always been ashamed of this black spot on its history, and has tried, in every way possible, to make the "*amende honourable*" to its coloured citizens. A year or so after its unfortunate "Mob Fourth," its white citizens gave an elaborate "Emancipation Celebration" at which all coloured people were their guests. Frederick Douglass was invited to be the orator of the day, but did not come. A year

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later, however, he spoke in a grove for the coloured people of Covert, nine miles from South Haven. My father was Grand Marshal of the Day upon that occasion. Douglass was then the recognised race leader, as was the late Booker T. Washington.

Times grew very hard in South Haven; and Grandfather was getting old. So, when I was about fourteen years old, we decided to make our home with an uncle of mine by the name of Henry, Grandfather's eldest son, in Muskegon, Michigan, a busy lumber city, where I could get work in the mills. We settled such debts as we had; bade our neighbours farewell, and placed our few belongings on board a small, two-masted schooner, upon which we also took passage. Soon the wind rose; the white seamen hoisted sail, and we were gone. We took our last look together at the little town, nestling in its woody cove at the mouth of "Black river"; we scanned its deep gullies; its picturesque, wooden bridges; the grove; the little, drooning sawmill; the stores; the quiet, shady streets and the white, sandy beach, until all at last became a distant blur across the widening expanse of Lake Michigan.

**SOME ADVENTURES AND A STRANGE
DISAPPEARANCE**

CHAPTER II

SOME ADVENTURES AND A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

ONE intensely hot afternoon in 1884, during one of the most exciting presidential campaigns that has passed into history in the United States, I had the privilege of listening to Gen. Benj. F. Butler, then the "Greenback Party's" candidate, speak to a great crowd of workingmen in Muskegon, Michigan.

Standing bare-headed under the blazing sun, Butler spoke for more than an hour from a rough board platform, pouring forth his burning indignation to the curious crowd in which I, a lad of nearly fifteen, constituted the entire Negro constituency. I had read so much of Gen. Butler: of his much-quoted saying, "The Negro troops fought nobly"; of his applying the term "contraband of war" to the slaves who sought protection at Fortress Monroe while he was in command there, and of his vigorous governorship of New Orleans that I wanted to see him. The doughty old warrior had been fighting rather an uphill battle almost everywhere; but still, with unabating persistency and spirit, was manfully belabouring his opponents.

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Opposing him were Blaine and Cleveland, the "Plumed Knight" and the "Man of Destiny," respectively the Republican and Democratic candidates—strong men. The three-cornered political battle, like the weather, had waxed exceeding hot; and Butler (who had once been a Democrat, and had been dubbed, during his Michigan campaign, "The Green-o-Dem-back candidate") was perspiring and wrathful.

"Samuel J. Tilden," he hotly asserted, "was elected to the presidency of the United States, but allowed the expressed will of a cognisable majority of the American people to be thwarted when he failed to insist upon taking his seat, and filling the high office. B-u-t!" he impregnably thundered, pounding the air with his fist, "*if I am elected, you will have a president who will take his seat, if all hell freezes!*"

"It couldn't freeze in *this* town!" bawled out a big fellow at my side.

And I thought he was right.

Muskegon had sprung up rapidly into a roaring, young city near the head of a small lake, four miles inland from Lake Michigan, amid scattered thickets—the fringe of an almost interminable wilderness. It rivalled Bay City and Saginaw as one of the chief lumbering cities of Michigan, and of the world. Its great, belching smokestacks—the black genii of its

Adventures and a Disappearance

lake—were almost too numerous to be counted; its fires roared night and day. It was a booming, forest giant with a population of perhaps 18,000. Two railroads tapped it; and its picturesque lake, fed by Muskegon river and emptying westward, through a mile-long continuation of the river, into Lake Michigan, made Muskegon virtually a lake port; and often, in summer, added roistering groups of sailors to its busy streets. It had many electric lights, but only two paved streets; and its wooden sidewalks were punctured and much worn by the spikes in the boots of its army of log-rafters and river men. Its saloons were legion. It was full of rough men who loved big wages, red liquor, square dealing and a fight. In the winter Muskegon slept. But things were sure to boom again in the spring, when the men came back from the lumber camps, flush with money, and the mills started up. Then the lights blazed and the town hummed!

In one of Muskegon's great mills I went to work before I was fifteen, toiling eleven hours a day for \$4.50 a week, more than half of which I paid my uncle Henry for board. Our mill was built upon piles, nearly half a mile out in the lake, and was reached from the shore by a road built of slabs and sawdust, and flanked with piling. It was more than two miles from my uncle's house to the mill; and I trudged this

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distance, morning and night, in common with a great army of labourers. They were rough, big-hearted men; and I was a big, rough boy, quick with the fists, and more than ordinarily strong. In the noon-day scuffles, common among mill hands, I was usually able to hold my own with men. In my heart there was no fear of them, nor of anything. I had grown up in that way—rough and unafraid. It was characteristic of most Western boys; and I was thoroughly at home in rough company. I had no bad habits, however, and had, in particular, an abiding abhorrence of liquor. For I had observed how it mastered and ruined men. I eschewed dancing, as a silly waste of time; and in the thought of personal continency took exultant delight. This was no conscious, whimsical effort to appear odd or self-righteous. I was led by inward promptings, as well as by my grandfather's strong influence, to keep my own life decent. And down in my heart was the burning desire to *accomplish* something; "to be somebody" in the world. I cannot remember when this resolve was not there, impelling my struggles for self-improvement.

"Hope leaves her kiss
On lips of Negroes black as Cain."

In the fall after I went to Muskegon, Grover Cleveland was elected to the presidency of the United

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States. Coloured people were naturally much concerned over the election. The dreaded Democrats had at last succeeded in landing a president in the White House, for the first time since before the Civil War; and in the minds of not a few misinformed coloured people it meant the re-establishment of slavery, or at least a bitter attempt at re-establishing it, though nothing could have been further from the character of Cleveland. But his sterling personal qualities were not then so generally known; and coloured people had been led to believe that the Democratic party had never thoroughly given up the hope of restoring to the South the dreaded institution which John Wesley forcefully epitomized as "the sum of all villanies." Northern Democrats, who had uncomplainingly gone down under successive Republican triumphs, were wildly jubilant over Cleveland's success. I recall that as I passed a large hall where the joy-mad Muskegon adherents of Cleveland were giving an uproarious ball, "the mirth and fun grew fast and furious," until at last the only way in which they were able to call off the figures of the dance was in the oft-repeated and hilarious exultation:

"Hurrah fur CLEVELAND!"

Colour prejudice in Muskegon was not especially noticeable. The city was too busy to pay much attention to the colour of a man who was a good worker

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and paid his bills. The families of white and coloured workingmen occasionally lived in the same house, each occupying half, harmoniously. Nevertheless, we coloured people did not attempt social intercourse with the whites, but strictly attended to our own affairs. Though we had not personally been slaves; and there were, in those days, no lynchings, and no baneful, public rantings about "the dangers of social equality," we realised that our race had but recently emerged from bondage, and we thought it more sensible to "take the lower seat, and be lifted up" than to aspire too high, and be ordered down. There were about fifty coloured people in Muskegon, and we could associate among ourselves. If white neighbours were disposed to be pleasant, we spoke pleasantly to them; but went no further, unless the whites repeatedly insisted upon "neighbouring" more closely with us, which they sometimes did. On Sundays we never attended church, there being no church for coloured people; but whiled away the time with card-playing, and with visiting among ourselves. When I say "card-playing," I do not mean *gambling*. We played purely for social amusement, without betting or boisterousness. And the white workingmen there did much the same. We differed more in colour than in habits. And Muskegon was not, in those days, noted for religious zeal.

Among the coloured people who lived in Muskegon

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then, "Big Bill" Watkins was the most notable character. In fact, I think he was, perhaps, the most talked-of man in town. Wonderful tales were told of his extraordinary strength and nerve. He was six feet, two and one-half inches tall, and weighed 225 pounds. People said he was as quick and well-muscled as a catamount; and "a dandy, fine fellow." He was brown, erect and not bad looking. He was the boss of a gang of stevedores, all of whom but two were white, and was called "the best man that ever struck Muskegon." He could trounce an ordinary prize-fighter for fun; and once whipped an entire boat's crew—seven men—whose captain, a great lake bully, had refused to allow "Big Bill's" men to load his vessel, when he discovered that they had a "*nigger captain*." Bill threw the entire crew into the lake, and kept them there until the captain apologised.

Normally, "Big Bill" was peaceful and law-abiding. He was very popular with all classes in Muskegon, and was sometimes called upon by the police to help them quell the unruly. I remember a particular instance:

A strange, dumpy Negro, calling himself "the King," blew suddenly into Muskegon one day, from somewhere, and began without delay to make a wretched nuisance of himself, annoying coloured women and bullying men. This Negro nomad who lived by

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exhibiting himself to physicians, and to the *hoi polloi* in the back rooms of saloons, was one of the weirdest anatomical freaks on earth. He could cause his heart to descend into his abdomen, and then make it appear to cease beating altogether. He had also a second and invisible set of ribs which, after many contortions and much puffing and snorting, he could bring unmistakably into evidence. He walked with a heavy, iron bar which he could bend over his bare forearm at a blow; and he claimed to be proficient in the black art. But his proudest boast was: "De white folks hung me a' hour an' ten minutes, in Texas, an' nevah *phased* me!" I personally witnessed his strange exhibition. Naturally, the police were a little shy about meddling with such an unmanageable creature. Coloured men, for the most part, openly admitted their fear of him.

The "King's" drunken rowdyism and obscenity finally became so intolerable that the police decided he must be squelched; but, apparently not relishing an encounter with him themselves, they persuaded "Big Bill" to act for them.

The "King" heard that his capture was decreed, but refused to leave town, or to reform. As "Big Bill" approached him, the "King" threatened to "blow fire upon him, and consume him to a cinder." "Big Bill," with a lightning-like movement, slapped the "King" sprawling into the street; then gathered him up under



But I surprised the fieldhand who had been hired to thrash me, by whipping him until he became the laughing-stock of the village, though he was twenty-seven and I was seventeen.



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one arm, carried him several blocks, and deposited him, wriggling, in a cell.

The judge did the rest; and we heard no more of the "King."

Some coloured people in those days, particularly *Northern* ones, were quite sensitive about being considered poor. They had a habit, sometimes, of pretending to be wealthy to persons who did not know their true circumstances.

"You see 'at big mansion yon'ah?" asked one of Muskegon's coloured barbers of a strange Negro who was visiting the town. "'At's my residence," he explained.

"Good Lawdy, Bruddah, I sees two suns!" declared the amazed new arrival.

"'At big hotel's mine," said the Muskegonite.

"Lawdy, Bruddah, I sees de stahs!" cried the bewildered visitor.

"'At sawmill's mine," continued the barber; "an' yon steamboat. 'N' I owns dis street car line, 'n' sev'ul o' dese big sto'es. 'N' I'm got money in *all* de banks!"

"Lawdy, Bruddah!" exclaimed the awed new-comer, "I's a-seein' *diamonds!*"

"See 'at li'l, no-counted bahber shop, yon'ah—all propped up wid bo'ds; look lak it g'ine t' fall down?"

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I means 'at hole on de co'ner 'at's disgracin' de town. Well, I owns 'at, too. But I'm 'shame' uv it!" (And *this* was all he *did* own!)

"Lawdy, ma bruddah!" exclaimed his new friend, "*now* I's a-seein' *straight*!"

My uncle Henry, with whom Grandfather and I lived, was married to a good-looking octoroon who could have passed for white. Because of our unhappy knowledge of certain of her indiscretions, she quarrelled with Grandfather and me; and set us both out of doors, though I was paying about all I made for board. Winter was coming on, and the mills were running "half-handed." I was splitting wood in the mill yard at twenty-five cents a cord. I went to my uncle and told him that, if he would stand for Grandfather's board at a neighbour's, I would try to pay the bill. He did what I asked, and I was able to make full settlement. To do it I slept upon slabs and sawdust in the mill's boiler-room, and lived on an occasional morsel of dry bread which I ate in the wood-yard. I was very happy to do this, and did not think it a hardship.

My uncle was by no means without sincere affection for his father. In truth, he was a kind-hearted man, but was dominated absolutely by his wife, whose slightest wish to *him* was law. For her he wore

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patched overalls, and fired five hot boilers, sometimes day and night; then tossed his pay-envelope to her, unopened, each fortnight, while she dressed like a bawdy queen. Her smile, in my uncle's adoring eyes, was brighter than the gold of Ophir; and her presence, like the spell of the lotus, made him oblivious to all else.

When my work grew so slack that I could no longer pay Grandfather's board, his daughter in Grand Rapids gave him a comfortable home. I remained and toughed it out. Winter was now at hand, and the mills were closed. A boy could not make a living in Muskegon then by selling papers and blacking boots, as he might have done in Chicago or Detroit. For who among those rough mill hands and lumbermen ever indulged in the needless luxury of a "*shine*"? Oh, no! they merely greased their heavy boots, as I did mine, to keep the snow and water out. And their chief reading matter was the illustrated *Police Gazette*. Fortunately, I secured work in a new roller-skating rink at two dollars a week. I found a place to stop with a young coloured man of excellent habits, Charles Green, who had come from Cleveland, Ohio. He kept bachelor quarters in some rooms over a store. Here I could sleep for twenty-five cents a week; and every other week I paid an extra quarter toward firewood. I lived and clothed myself on the remainder

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of my wages and occasional small tips. I had no bed, but slept on the bare floor; used my arm for a pillow, and covered with my coat. I slept in that way nearly six weeks, when my uncle's wife, taking pity on me, gave me a bed and some bedding which Grandfather had left behind.

The winter was a long, hard one. My working hours were from nine in the morning until ten o'clock at night. I lodged on the outskirts of the city; and often, as I blundered back through the dark, deserted streets, I would flounder waist-deep in snowdrifts, half lost and wet. In the spring I went over to Grand Rapids, and found work on a farm at ten dollars a month and board. I was a large boy, weighing 160 pounds, and was approaching my sixteenth birthday. Grandfather lived then with his son Joseph, my uncle, nearby. I was able to pay this uncle a small sum monthly to help him care for Grandfather. But the hard usage and privations of the previous winter at last demanded their toll of me. I came down with typhoid fever; and for weeks my life was despaired of. When I recovered, I was a mere wreck, weighing less than ninety pounds. I was without work or money; and my welcome was nowhere overwhelming.

With my ever-faithful Grandfather, I took a corn-husking job; and, between us, we got enough money together to pay my fare back to Muskegon. I was

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too weak to walk a mile without resting, but went to work in the woods near Muskegon, "pulling a crosscut-saw," and chopping cord wood all winter, along with two men. Before spring, I was quite well and strong again. I went back to the sawmill, when the season opened, boarding with my uncle Henry again.

That spring Grandfather came over to visit me. Soon my Muskegon relatives began to hint that it would be best to "put the old man in the poor house." His other children, they argued, had apparently tired of him. Why should *they* take care of him—*alone*? It was only necessary, they affirmed, to gain *my* consent to make their plan unanimous.

I loudly denounced their ungrateful scheme and *them*. "You shall never put Grandfather in any poor house!" I cried. "*I'll* take care of him! When my pay day comes, he and I will go back to South Haven!"

Grandfather agreed to my plan; and so it was settled.

The next evening, when I returned from work, Grandfather could not be found. My relations expressed great surprise and concern about him. We searched throughout the city, but found no trace of him. Late that night, we were informed at the depot that an old man answering his description had bought a ticket for Grand Rapids that afternoon. We were satisfied that this was Grandfather. A few days later

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I wrote to my relatives in Grand Rapids, but received no reply. Coloured people have never been distinguished for promptness in the matter of correspondence, so I thought nothing odd of their silence, feeling that Grandfather must be safe with them. Yet I felt aggrieved to think that he had forsaken *me* so lightly. I did not know until months afterward, when I was working in Liberty, Indiana, that he was never heard of again. To this day his disappearance remains a mystery. The remains of a man; and an old, bone-handled knife, like one he carried, were found in the woods near Muskegon some months afterward, I learned.

The morning after Grandfather disappeared I was ordered to leave my uncle's house; and never come back again. And I never did.

I slept that night in an empty freight car near my uncle's home; and the next night, crawled into the hole of an old tug, lying at an out-of-the-way wharf, and slept upon a pile of rope and oakum. I had no money, and it wanted four days yet till pay day. Snow still lay upon the ground, in patches; and the weather was cold. I had no overcoat, nor any clothing other than what I had on. I managed to subsist upon whatever the white men and boys generously gave me from their dinner pails.

The last night a coloured barber allowed me to sleep

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in his shop, beside a warm fire. Shortly before the shop closed, a half-drunken Irish sailor, a veritable giant, came in to get warm. The barber had him stay, too; but left me in charge. I discovered that the sailor was well read. He quoted Burns and Tom Moore, and sang jolly songs. Once, in an ugly mood, he wanted to fight me, but when I showed no signs of fear, a look of admiration came into the big Irishman's eyes. He extended his hand to me.

"Ye're just th' bye I want!" he exclaimed. "Come along with me on th' lakes. Ye're sober and honest and have a nerve; and I want ye to chum with me. Ye'll be th' banker fer th' two av us. We'll go over to Chicago," he explained, "and ship out o' thot port."

It didn't seem to matter much *what* I did, just then. The romantic side of the thing appealed to me. "I'm as well off one place as another," I said. "Nobody cares for *me*, anyway."

The big sailor looked up, and pointing heavenward, admonished me, with a strange tenderness: "There's One up there who cares fer ye, lad. An' He's never set ye adrift on this Sea av Loife without some sailin' papers. Come along with *me*!"

I agreed.

"Jack," the sailor, was "broke," like myself; but the morrow was my long-wished-for pay day. I had

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nearly six dollars coming. Jack insisted that this be straightly kept as "a stake" for our expenses in Chicago. We "stowed away" on the old steam barge *Fayette*, crawling far down into the hole among her boilers, and lay low until the boat got out into Lake Michigan. Then Jack sent me out to reconnoiter, following afterwards. We were discovered by the firemen, and set to work. The chief engineer and I became great friends. "You'll be O. K.," he explained, "if the captain don't see you. You want to keep shy of *him*!"

Until far into the night Jack and I fired the boat, working our passage; then ate a big supper, and turned in. In the morning the wonders of Chicago loomed before me. We were a mile up the river, docking, before the captain saw me, and went petrified with surprise.

"Well, where'd *you* come frum?" he demanded. "An' whut kind of a double-dashed, Gehenna-doomed *race* are you?—In'jun, Dago er Jew? Er jest a low-down, Billy-be-cussed *nigger*?" he exploded, in a breath. (My face was begrimed with dirt, dust and oil; and he couldn't tell by my features).

"I'm an *American*," I answered, banteringly. "Now, good sir, what are *you*?—In'jun, Da——"

The captain charged furiously at Jack and me, but we got ashore.

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All day Jack and I tried for a berth together on boats of almost every sort, but without success. "We'll take *you*," they always told Jack; "but we can't use the boy."

"It'll be both or neither!" Jack always replied. "Come along, Lad!"

I, of course, was paying all expenses.

Toward evening, we picked up another fellow, a brisk, quick-spoken chap who had a foreign accent. He assured us that, if we would go with him to Tona-wanda, N. Y., we could all get jobs easily, through the influence of his father who kept a saloon there. I could get work, "driving a canal boat," he said. This appealed to me mightily. Had not Garfield been a canal boat driver? But, somehow, the idea did not appeal to my friend Jack.

We all had supper together, and I paid for it. By this time I had decided to go. The lure of the canal boat was strong. Jack begged me to stick to *him*; but I was adamant. Besides, I saw that I was unmistakably hindering him from obtaining work. "I'll go with *this* fellow," I announced, positively.

"Then, good-bye, and God keep ye," said Jack.

I have never seen him since.

The stranger began immediately to "borrow" money from me, until he had obtained my last cent, "for a little tobacco." Our plan was to beat our way through

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on a fast express which left that evening. At the depot he attempted to borrow more money from me, "for medicine," he declared.

"I *have* no more money," I told him.

"Well, say!" he exclaimed, quite desperately, "I've just *got* to have what I need! Sit here, and don't move 'till I come back."

He hasn't come back yet. He didn't intend to.

When at last I realised that I had been duped and abandoned, a sense of my true situation stole over me. I determined to leave Chicago at once. "*Anywhere, anywhere*, out of this great, wicked city!" I mourned aloud. I inquired my way to the station from which the Michigan Central trains departed, bent upon getting back to Muskegon—and a job. A policeman kindly directed me.

Through some mysterious stroke of good fortune, I was enabled to board the train, which appeared quite deserted. I walked through several coaches. Not a passenger was in sight. I hid myself in the men's closet, and went to sleep. In the morning when the train stopped, I jumped out, and, running ahead, asked the engineer: "What place is this?"

"Auburn, Indiana," he informed me.

I had taken the wrong train, supposing that all trains running out of the Chicago depot to which I had been directed went to Michigan. "It's good I've

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studied geography," I mused, turning back to the depot to look up Auburn on the map.

When I finally located it in northeastern Indiana, near the Ohio line, I decided to make my way farther down into Indiana and Ohio, where my mother's people lived. I had corresponded with them somewhat while living in South Haven, and had been invited to visit them. I had never seen my mother's picture, even; and knew nothing of what her people were like, but felt that I could get on as well in Ohio or Indiana as in Michigan. I resolved to go there, instead of returning to Muskegon (which was as far away), and being laughed at for my failure to get a job on the lakes. It was a delightful spring morning. I got my bearings; and started up the track afoot, hungry, but unafraid and cheerful. I found a piece of hard bread on the track; brushed it off, and ate it down. That night I rode into Fort Wayne on top of a box car. It had rained that afternoon, and I was soaked through to the skin. The engineer at the city waterworks allowed me to stand before his boilers and warm a bit. Then I entered a half-filled freight car; removed my wet coat; pulled some sheets of brown wrapping-paper over me, and fell asleep. Fortunately, the car was not moved. The next morning, in a little town, some kind ladies gave me a good meal. It was my only real meal, en route.

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After more than a week of semi-starvation on the road; of alternately riding with tramps and footing it alone; and several times narrowly escaping serious injury, I reached Oxford, Ohio, and found two of my mother's brothers, and other relatives, by whom I was kindly received. I soon obtained work in a hotel in Liberty, Indiana, a few miles from Oxford, where my mother's youngest brother lived. There, for the first time, I learned through a letter from Michigan, that my grandfather did not go to Grand Rapids, and had never been found. The years have come and gone. My uncle Henry is dead. A sense of Grandfather's true worth has fallen upon the hearts of his children. But we have searched for him in vain. The mystery of his disappearance remains unsolved.

"No man knows the track
Of his last journey, and he comes not back."

NEW FRIENDS—NEW PURSUITS

CHAPTER III

NEW FRIENDS—NEW PURSUITS

A SOBER, little county seat, amid quiet scenes through which a railroad winds, Liberty, Indiana, doubtless cherishes an honest desire for at least incidental mention by faithful chroniclers. It is notable as the birthplace of Gen. Ambrose Burnside; but was, when I knew it, rather a dozy, little village, save for the trains which came noisily rumbling through at various hours of the day. The town is about sixty miles southeast from Indianapolis.

During my sojourn there, as "man of all work" at the "Commercial Hotel," I was on duty seventeen hours daily, from five o'clock in the morning until ten at night, meeting trains, scrubbing floors, running errands, or waiting table; or, if the landlord happened to be out, or "half seas over," acting as clerk in the office—all for the munificent wage of two dollars a week and board. I made extra money by wheeling trunks for drummers to and from the depot; and in that way was sometimes able to double my earnings. I had seldom many moments to myself during the

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day; but the nights were mine, and during these precious hours, I laboured at self-improvement, studying such textbooks as I could get, and reading good authors. I recall still the delight I found in the works of Rider Haggard, and the poetry of Burns and Heine; and I was especially delighted with the work of James Whitcomb Riley, who was then just winning popularity through his Hoosier dialect verse. I pondered, too, over Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," and the "Elegy" of Gray; and was familiar with the lighter work of Longfellow, Whittier and Tennyson; and of other poets. I had a habit, when I wanted advice, of turning to some favourite book for it, thus living, as nearly as I was capable of it, in the companionship of that which I had found helpful and uplifting. I had read much of the Bible, and of history, and was generally conversant with the careers of American public men. In my own heart, I wanted to be a poet, having been from early childhood a versemaker, after some sort.

The man for whom I worked, an angular Ohioan, was looked upon as an enemy by the few coloured people who lived in Liberty because of his harsh treatment of a coloured former employé. My predecessor at the hotel had been a big, harmless, happy-go-lucky Negro of the distinguished "moniker" of "Eph." He was about twenty-six years old; a good worker, hon-

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est, and very good natured, but perfectly illiterate. To his boss, the landlord, he was as abject and obedient as a slave. Unresisting and uncomplaining, he meekly bore whatever treatment was given him; and never shirked nor protested if his pay was withheld. But, finally the long-suffering Eph made a secret resolve to quit. He secured a job in another town, and donning his new suit which the boss had given him, hastily departed before sunrise, one Sunday morning, footing it for his new job, sixteen miles away. He had walked about four miles before the landlord woke up, and, missing him, secured a horse and buggy and started in hot pursuit. He overtook Eph on a sandy stretch of road, and after threatening him with the buggy whip, compelled him to strip. Then he gathered up the suit, and after giving Eph "a genteel lashing," drove away, leaving the poor, bewildered Negro standing in the public highway—in his underwear.

Certain parts of Indiana and lower Illinois, during this period, were looked upon by my race as veritable plague spots of race prejudice; and, although Liberty was not one of these, it seems to me a fair exemplification of the spirit which it had *borrowed* from the more deeply infested localities to record that merely because I stopped working for one of its well-to-do citizens and began to work for another, the man whom I had unwittingly offended secretly hired

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a big Negro of the lumbering fieldhand type to thrash me for quitting him. But I surprised the fieldhand by whipping him until he became the laughing-stock of the village, though he was twenty-seven and I was seventeen. I had been a fighter all my life—a thing he had not known. The affair got into the local papers, and I was referred to as “Buzz Saw Jim”; and the big farmer, as “the Butchered Ox.” The self-consciously humorous local editors were not honest enough to say that a boy had merely defended himself against a hulking thing in the shape of a man. We were both referred to in the papers as being “ignorant, vicious Negroes.”

I had a particular friend in Liberty, a prosperous man of middle age, who kept the village bookstore. With kindly patience, he read and criticised my boyish verses; and he encouraged and commended me for the decent life I tried to live. I deeply regret that I am now unable to recall his name. The cashier, too, in the bank where I had a wee, pin's point of an account, poured out his indignation and sympathy to me. There is in me, I trust, no blood lust, nor pure vanity of fighting, yet my youthful fistic encounters were experiences which have seemed to me like reassuring milestones on my road to higher achievements and development. Because of them I have said

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to myself: "I can also do this *other*, better, *nobler* thing!" They have given me courage, often, to fight on against odds.

From Liberty, I went to Wilberforce, Ohio, near Xenia, intending to enter college, with my tiny store of cash; but finally decided to go on to Springfield, Ohio, and work another year. In Springfield, a busy, manufacturing city, I first saw and stopped at a coloured hotel. But it was a miserable affair where one tumbled through the beds, and could not stand erect in the rooms. I was glad to get a job as coachman, and to sleep in a barn.

When I hired out as coachman, I had never harnessed nor driven a horse. The summer when I worked on the farm, in Michigan, I had not done these things, the farmer himself preferring to handle the horses. I suggested to my new employer, Mr. Louis W. Phillips, that, as I was strange to the horse, it *might* be better for *him* to put the harness on the first time, as the horse might not take so kindly to *my* doing it. Mr. Phillips readily consented, and by observing him, I learned how the thing was done. I remained with Mr. Phillips more than a year.

The Phillips home was on High Street, the "Euclid avenue of Springfield," within a few blocks of the

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home of Gen. Warren Keifer, for many years the United States representative from that district, and of the palatial residence of Gen. Bushnell, who afterwards became the Governor of Ohio. Former Senator Joseph B. Foraker, then Governor of Ohio, was a warm friend and sometime guest of Gen. Bushnell, and I thus saw much of Foraker at close range—for Mr. Phillips, though not a rich man, was on terms of intimate friendship with these men. He was cashier of the "Whitely Reaper Works," a vast concern, in which he owned a few shares of stock. He was a man of quiet tastes and kindly ways. It was to him a genuine pleasure to grant me access to his library. He was one of God's good men! I never think of him without a thrill of gratitude.

It was while working for Mr. Phillips that my first poem was printed in the *Champion City Times*, a Springfield daily paper. It was entitled, "The Deserted School House," and began (I quote from memory, without retouching) :

"Nestled amid the meadow lands,
An old schoolhouse forsaken stands.
A dreary highway runs before
The cracked and weather-beaten door;
Haunted of winds, in mournful state,
The old house murmurs of its fate
 'Forlorn, but not forgotten.'"

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The poem consisted of three stanzas of about twenty lines each, and was rather kindly commented upon, I learned, by the citizens of Springfield, not because it possessed any particular merit, but because it was the production of a local coloured youth. But I recall still, with a smile, how Mrs. Phillips, the good wife of my employer, could not, by any system of reasoning or faith, bring herself to believe that I had actually originated the lines. "Yes, James," she repeatedly protested to me, "you *wrote* it, but *who* was the *author* of it?" I have seldom had anything printed since in a magazine but I have wondered if the dear lady still held to her opinion.

No better class of coloured people, surely, has ever been produced in this country, anywhere, than those who lived in Springfield, Ohio, at that period. They were industrious, progressive and intelligent. A large percentage owned homes, and a few were in business. They had beautiful churches, intelligent ministers and competent school teachers. There was not a disreputable Negro in the city. A splendid feeling of mutual respect and trust existed between the races there, and colour was not an absolute bar against advancement. The acknowledged best pianist in Springfield was "Billy" Love, a young coloured man, who was sometimes asked to play in the homes of the

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leading whites. Springfield's white people seemed proud of him. Of the Rev. Albery A. Whitman, too, then the acknowledged coloured poet of America, Springfield was especially proud. He had won enviable literary recognition while pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Springfield. His splendid, blank verse poem, "Not a Man, and Yet a Man," had attracted wide attention, and had been unstintingly praised by such writers as Opie P. Reid, Longfellow, Bryant and Whittier.

Whitman was a tall, fine-looking man, and could easily have passed for white. He was born a slave in Kentucky, shortly before the war; and had graduated at Wilberforce College. He was sometimes invited to preach in white pulpits, in Springfield, and frequently had a group of white visitors in his own congregation. The poet Dunbar was partly contemporaneous with Whitman, who died only about twelve years ago. The following lines from Whitman's poem are still sometimes quoted:

"In bondage held; and daily toil my lot;
My birthplace where the scrub-wood thicket grows,
I envy not the halo title throws
Around the birth of any."

It is difficult for me to realise the changed attitude that seems to have been brought about between the races in Springfield, and the terrible holocausts of



At the age of twenty, I had done considerable amateur boxing. I now decided that, since there seemed to be no hope for me as a writer, I might as well become a professional pugilist.



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race hate which have swept over the place. I can only attempt to explain it (*to myself*) upon the supposition that an inferior element must have been introduced into one or both races there. But it is difficult for me to believe this of the coloured people of Springfield.

When I lived in Ohio, the *Cleveland Gazette*, a weekly coloured newspaper, edited by Harry C. Smith, who later became a state representative, was the most potent influence for good among the coloured people of the state. In the fight which was then being waged for "mixed public schools," as against "separate" and inferior schools, exclusively for coloured children, it led and largely won the fight. It exercised a paternal influence over the minds of the young coloured people of the state. A threat in its editorial columns to publish the names of young coloured persons who misbehaved on the streets in Cleveland, or in any city where it circulated, usually had the desired effect of stopping them. Its editor was considered quite a great personage by us. We wondered where all his wisdom came from.

In Springfield a white magazine was published. It was called, if I remember correctly, *The Farm and Fireside*. Its editor lived on High street, a few doors from Mr. Phillips. I remember offering the editor a poem which I read over to him in person. It was

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an attempt at *German dialect*! I remember still how broadly the courteous editor smiled, as he rejected it—not, I know *now*, at what I imagined its irresistible humor; but—at *me*.

Frederick Douglass lectured in the opera house at Springfield while I was there, under the auspices of a committee of leading coloured citizens. He read from manuscript. In the middle of his lecture, the lights went out, and Douglass, standing dimly outlined on the dark stage, cheerily announced: "Brethren, let's turn this meeting into an old-fashioned Republican Love Feast." He went on to state that, in his opinion, "the next Republican candidate for President would not be James G. Blaine" (as we all confidently expected) "but that strong son of OHIO, John Sherman!" But in this Douglass was mistaken. For Benjamin Harrison was nominated and elected. The "Young Men's Republican Club" of which, though not old enough to vote, I was a member, joined in the parade which was given by the Republican organizations of the city in Harrison's honour.

This "Young Men's Republican Club" was not simply a political organization. It was political merely *in name*, and "*Republican*" as a matter of course. The aim of its political activity was *patriotism*, not party strife; and it laid most stress on the moral and in-

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tellectual development of its members. Out of it have come some of the finest spirits of my race—such men as Emmet J. Scott, our secretary, for many years the private secretary of the late Dr. Booker T. Washington, at Tuskegee; and another young man whose name I cannot recall, a machinist, who became Dr. Washington's chief instructor in the machine shop at Tuskegee. Some of its members have become ministers or entered upon other useful professions. I do not know of any who has not developed into useful citizenship. The companionship of these young men was especially delightful and helpful to me. I was their "poet," and they were especially kind to me. Some of them had had better advantages than I. Some were law students; several were practised speakers and declaimers. It was through their insistent encouragement that I should "*try*" that I ever even dreamed of speaking in public. They seemed determined to make "an orator" out of me. Most of them were my seniors, and were fortunate in having grown up in Ohio where the customs of society were more advanced than amid the rough scenes where I had been reared. I admired the more polished manners of these bright young men. The daily papers reported our doings, as if they were really of importance.

While a member of this club, at the beginning of

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the first Cleveland-Harrison campaign, I wrote a number of campaign songs, to the airs of such old war tunes as "When Johnnie Comes Marching Home" and "Marching Through Georgia," and of the popular songs of the day. I conceived the idea of getting my songs out in book form and selling them during the campaign, in the hope of clearing enough money to put me well nigh through college. I was then nineteen. I drew my small savings from the bank; sent ten dollars to my sister (two years older than I), who was then supporting herself; and started with great expectations to Chicago, to carry out my plan. My idea failed of success, largely, I believe, because I did not know how to manage it; and I found myself, sitting hungry and "broke," in the lake front park, in Chicago, one morning, pretty blue; and wondering where I could get a job.

Soon a big coloured man, whom I had noticed approaching several other persons, ran up to where I was sitting. "Want a job, boy?" he asked.

"Yes! Where?" I replied, quickly.

"On the lakes," he answered.

And so it was that I shipped that morning as a pantryman on the old steamer *Peerless*, then a lake leviathan, at \$18.00 a month. The *Peerless*, I learned, plied between Chicago and Duluth, Minn., making certain ports en route. It was a round trip of twenty-

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two hundred miles, and it required two weeks for the slow-going old *Peerless* to make it. That night we put out into one of the fiercest storms I have ever seen. Thunderous and vast, the night-black lake rose up, and shook and tossed us like a black rat, frothing its rage, while the fire-veined heavens bellowed approving wrath. "Eight hours to the next port, and a jolly night to work," our head pantryman laughed.

I was on the lakes at last.

The *Peerless* was both a freight and passenger steamer, owned by a company of wealthy Jews in Chicago. The founder of the company had laid the foundation of his fortune and established a prosperous trade route by tramping with a pedlar's pack on his shoulders through the forests, in the early days, from settlement to settlement, between Chicago and Duluth, covering the territory along the route over which the company's eight steamers then plied. He was still living—a white-headed, hale, old man who often made the trip with his family, for pleasure, on one of the company's boats.

Of the thirty-odd Negroes who worked on the *Peerless*, only two or three were sober, respectable men. For the rest, they were worthless driftwood, drinking and gambling up their earnings nightly, by lantern-light, in the dark, narrow "flicker," as the forward hole on the *Peerless* where the coloured boys slept

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was called. They were of the "razor-toting" class whose nearly every word is an indecency or an oath, or a threat to "cut yo' h'a't out." Their ways were not my ways; and their thoughts were not my thoughts. Their conversations fairly' reeked with lasciviousness and vulgarity. They were not Northerners, but Southern Negroes, come North, and gone to the devil. Some were loathsome with venereal diseases, of which, as of their unholy alliances, they openly boasted. On the backs of several were great, ugly razor cuts—raw, sickening gashes into which a finger could have been laid. But they profanely joked about *that*, sometimes with the very fellow who had done the cutting. Wallowing about on the floor of the "flicker," every night these dusky gamblers shot dice, and excitedly threatened one another with murder in every degree.

The first night of my association with these men I was speechless with the horror of it. I thought I had almost reached the confines of hell. I expected every moment to see murder done, or to be slain myself. I crawled meekly into my berth and lay there, unable to sleep, trembling at the raging bedlam below me. But the night passed, and nobody was killed; the next night, and the next. And I got *used* to it. Before the end of my second trip, I had thrashed the "bully of the boat" in a combat which came near ending

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fatally for me. Since my coming on the *Peerless* he had made me the special object of his obscene vituperations and bullying. Our steward, who had actually feared the bully before, now found courage to set the poor, crestfallen fellow ashore, penniless, at Marquette—700 miles from Chicago. I knew that this was a breach of the marine law, inspired merely by the man's colour. Notwithstanding the ruffian had attempted to stab me with a butcher's knife, during our encounter, I felt so sorry for him that I emptied all the money in my pockets into his hands.

On one of our trips up the lakes we carried two very interesting young passengers, white Canadian boys, a trifle younger than myself, bright, intelligent fellows who had run away from home "to seek their fortunes," they informed us, in the United States. About two months later, they boarded the *Peerless* at Ashland, Wisconsin, and begged to be taken back to Canadian soil as "stowaways." "We have had enough of the Yankees," declared the older boy. "They are a grabbing, grasping people, and are not making the substantial progress that we are achieving in Canada. They nearly starved us, too!"

I risked hiding them in my bunk, and fed them until we reached the "Soo" canal. From that point, by simply crossing the "Soo" river, they would be in

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Canada, and could make their way home by land. I trust they did.

We ate our Christmas dinner in Marquette, with a heavy fall of snow lying upon our upper decks; and a snow storm raging. I had saved \$90.00 when the boat laid up that trip in Chicago. I sent ten dollars to my sister, bought a decent suit of clothing, and with the remainder faced the winter until I could secure a job. After about three weeks of trying, I answered an advertisement for a porter in a white barber shop, and was given the place. There, through some unknown chance, some of my former "shipmates," white as well as coloured men, having wasted their money, happened to find me, and demanded "sailors' remembrance" of me—the price of a bed or a meal—whenver they came. It is strange how association binds men together with bonds of sympathy, and how hardship often brings out the *best* in a man! I found that not one of these men had appealed to a living soul for assistance until he had suffered dire hardship; and not one of them came back for a loan when he had, in any sense, gotten upon his feet. In the spring I firmly refused to go back on the boat, though several times importuned to do so.

One day there came into our shop a tall, splendid man, with the distinguished manner of a courtier.

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From the plainness of his attire I judged him to be a man of fallen fortune, but unmistakably a *gentleman*, and of literary tastes. I determined to *know* this man. As I blackened his boots, I talked literature to him; and he to me. It was Henry Demarest Lloyd, author of "Newest England," "Labour Co-Partnership," "Wealth Against Commonwealth," etc., a more than well-to-do man, who was the friend of Labour, and who was destined soon to be regarded as one of the most eminent and authoritative writers in the field of political economy—a friend of all men—a reformer upon whose shoulders the mantle of Wendell Phillips might well have fallen. As he talked with me that day, Mr. Lloyd repeated for me a stanza which, he informed me, Gray had eliminated from the original draft of the "Elegy" as unworthy:

"There, scattered oft in earliest of the year
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;
The red-breast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

"Is it not beautiful?" my new friend asked.

Mr. Lloyd was the husband of Jessie Bross Lloyd, whose father, William Bross, had been Lieutenant-Governor of Illinois and was then one-quarter owner of the *Chicago Tribune*, in which Mr. Lloyd was also a stockholder and on which he had formerly been an editorial writer. I remember showing him some

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verses of mine, which he took away with him. They were entitled "The Soldier's Excuse," and related how a Union soldier had stolen a rooster which had "crowed for Jeff Davis," and had brought a hen along "for witness." About ten days after my first meeting with Mr. Lloyd my verses appeared on the editorial page of the *Tribune* over my name.

A few months after my meeting with Mr. Lloyd, "Matt," an old coloured man who had been employed for twenty years in the *Tribune's* counting room, as porter, died; and, through Mr. Lloyd's influence, the place was secured for me. It was the best-paying position I had ever had—\$10.00 a week. Mr. Lloyd had secured it for me so that I might be able to save money to go to college. I was surprised, when I took the *Tribune* position, to hear one of the white clerks in the counting room quoting my poem about "The Soldier's Excuse," and commenting upon it to others. He went about his duties in the office, sometimes, reciting the opening lines:

"Away down South where, light and free,
The sunlit streams are flowing;
Where flowers blossom o'er the lea,
And tall, green corn is growing,
A jolly, reckless Yankee boy
Adown the road was tramping,
With heart fresh-filled with new-born joy,
To meet his mates, encamping."

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But he dropped this performance abruptly when he discovered that the writer of the piece was merely a Negro youth, working in the humble capacity of porter—right under his very nose.

Mr. Lloyd remained my steadfast friend. I was frequently a guest at his delightful home in Winnetka, a quiet, little village on the lake bluff, to the north of Chicago. How the beauty and fragrance of that ideal home, "The Wayside," truly a Liberty Hall, come back to me, sweet with the idyllic comradeship and friendliness of that truly mated pair, the Lloyds! To the east lay Lake Michigan, of many moods, and in the west were the woods of silver birch and pine, through which one had delightful walks. And there were the village and the broad acres of the Lloyds, southward and northward. To this home came Wm. T. Stead, George Trevelyan, Walter Crane, the artist, Jane Addams, of Hull House fame, Professor Bemis, then of the Chicago University, Governor Altgeld, and Booker T. Washington; and there Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote three poems, including her lines on immortality. Yet a poor factory girl, slaving for a few dollars a week, an Irish widow, an old lady from a Home, or even a tramp, would be given shelter there—NOT as a helpless *nuisance*, but as a *guest*. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd, though not church members, came very near to bringing the Kingdom of Heaven upon the

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earth in the friendly democracy of their home where, as some one has said, "No one cared what he had, or what he wore, but poor and rich got richer, and every one gained but no one lost."

It is hard for me to realise that both of the Lloyds are gone. After Mr. Lloyd's death, in 1903, Mrs. Lloyd wrote me, bravely, in her sorrow:

"Thank you, dear Mr. Corrothers, for your loving words about my Husband. He was indeed your true friend, and he rejoiced in your good work. Because of Henry Lloyd we will all work more nobly, more successfully.

—JESSIE BROSS LLOYD."

One year later she followed Mr. Lloyd. Those of us who had known their tender and loyal devotion to each other were not surprised. When I think of the tender, noble man who so generously honoured me with his friendship, I know no words which so truly express my own feeling of loss and gratitude as those which the Rev. Dr. H. W. Thomas spoke at Chicago's memorial meeting to Mr. Lloyd: "O blessed friend and brother—friend of man, friend of God; farewell and hail!"

IN CHICAGO AND IN A NORTHERN
UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

IN CHICAGO AND IN A NORTHERN UNIVERSITY

THE *Chicago Tribune* was in those earlier days, as now, one of the leading newspapers of the Northwest, and one of the best in the country. Among the men then prominently connected with it were its veteran editor, Joseph Medill, R. W. Patterson, William Bross, one-fourth owner and former Lieutenant-Governor of Illinois, John E. Wilkie, the City Editor, who later became Chief of the United States Secret Service Bureau in Washington, and Vance Thompson, the "star" reporter, now a magazine writer. Jennette L. Gilder was its Literary Critic; and there was a clever young woman who wrote for the paper over the pseudonym of "Nora Marks." Miss "Marks," who had been a school teacher, was a sort of pioneer woman journalist in the West, and her work became one of the strongest features in the *Tribune*. She rode upon handcars, worked in factories, and entered hospitals as "a patient," and described her experiences in a lively, taking way, for the readers of the paper.

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With Mr. Wilkie, Mr. Patterson, Governor Bross and Joseph Medill I became well acquainted, and I grew to know Miss "Marks" quite well. She never entered the counting-room without giving me a pleasant word or a smile of encouragement. In her newspaper wanderings she visited South Haven, where I was raised, and wrote a three-column story about "the miles of fragrant orchards and vineyards," the resorts and the town, telling of the "make-believe railroad" (narrow gauge), the "toy engine and tiny train" by which the village was reached. Miss "Marks'" real name, I believe, was Elinor Stackhouse; and the offers of marriage which her newspaper work provoked were legion.

When I knew Mr. Medill he was well along in years, and very deaf. Yet the impress of the great editor, who moved in a sphere so far above my own, seemed indubitably stamped upon the pages of the *Tribune*. A sense of his personality filled the minds of those who came into daily contact with him. His deafness, his ear-trumpet, his hearty dislikes, his peculiar voice, his pecuniary exactness and carefulness, were common topics around the counting-room. There was a story current among the *Tribune's* employés to the effect that the veteran editor once came into the counting-room to mail a letter, and that, just after he

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had placed the letter in the box, the man for whom it was intended happened to come in.

"Wait a minute," remarked Medill dryly, "I wish to speak with you."

Then he fished the letter out of the mail box and saved the stamp.

One day, shortly after I went to the *Tribune* counting-room to work, "Governor" Bross called me into his office and asked me my name. When I had informed him, he broke forth into a eulogy of "Matt," my deceased predecessor. "He was industrious, sober, and faithful," he told me. "And he was as honest as the day. He was our porter in this counting-room for twenty years; and if *you* will be a good boy, James, *you* can remain here twenty years." I thanked him simply, and returned to my work.

Mr. Bross was no doubt a sincere friend of my race. As Lieutenant-Governor of Illinois, from 1865 to 1869, when Illinois was the first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, Mr. Bross, as presiding officer of the state senate, had been the first person to sign it. But I saw by the position he had taken in his conversation with me that he considered the Negro an undeveloped man, fitted only for the most humble things in life. Upon this plane he was willing to help him, and to stand by him. He

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had never dreamed a Negro could *want* anything different.

Not long afterward Mr. Patterson called me into his office and inquired if I did not want to get up an article for the *Tribune*. He informed me that what he wanted was a "story" which would show the progress of the coloured people of Chicago—the extent of their property holdings, their leading people and business enterprises. It would be about the first thing of the kind ever attempted, he thought. It seemed an opportunity for me to do a service for the *Tribune*, and for my race; indeed, the opportunity of my life. I thanked him enthusiastically, and took up the suggestion with delight.

I could not give up my job to do the story, but utilised my spare time, early in the morning, at noon, after working hours, and on Sundays, to secure interviews. Being practically a stranger in Chicago, and entirely untrained as an interviewer, the task was by no means an easy one. I had first to ascertain the names and addresses of the leading coloured people of the city, then decide as to the best manner of approaching them, for coloured people had been so persistently misrepresented by the Northern press in those days that they were wary of reporters. Even intelligent coloured people were commonly made to say "dis" and "dat" in the average newspaper, and some-



Age twenty-nine. A sunburst fell upon my being. My soul seemed relieved. I could now conscientiously enter the ministry of Christ.



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times ludicrously misrepresented as carrying a "rabbit's foot" or a razor. I had to *assure* them that they would receive no such treatment at *my* hands before they would consent to an interview.

I spent the spare moments of an entire month scouring the city for information and preparing my story. I interviewed Dr. Daniel H. Williams, who had won his way up from a Chicago street bootblack to a splendid practice on Michigan avenue, and to be the owner of much Chicago real estate. Dr. Williams was the first surgeon in the world to operate successfully on the heart of a living man. He could easily have passed as a white man. Numbers of white newspaper men had besieged him in vain. I was the first newspaper representative who succeeded in interviewing him. I also interviewed Edward H. Morris, the coloured corporation lawyer, the late Charles H. Smiley, coloured, but the leading caterer in the Northwest, and Lloyd G. Wheeler, a coloured tailor who did a five-thousand-dollars-a-year business and was an official member of All Souls' Church (white). (Mr. Wheeler is now an instructor at Tuskegee.) I told of Mrs. John G. Jones, Mr. Wheeler's mother-in-law, worth \$300,000; of the late Lewis Bates, worth \$500,000, and of practically every Negro who had accomplished anything out of the ordinary at that time in Chicago. I visited the post office, the city hall, the public library, and many big

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business concerns. I told of the coloured floor-walker then at Siegel-Cooper's Chicago store. I secured data and set down fact and circumstance, and turned in my work as well written as I could make it.

It was late winter. A day or two after my "story" was turned in, I became ill of tonsillitis, and had to pay a man to hold my position, for I was under a doctor's care. One Sunday while I was still sick the "story" came out. It was about three columns in length and was set off with five or six cuts of prominent coloured Chicagoans, but nearly every sentence of my work had been recast into what was then the customary newspaper way of speaking of coloured folk.

My story, I learned, had been put into the hands of a white reporter, with instructions to rewrite it "in newspaper style."

And he surely did!

In the place where I had said of Lloyd G. Wheeler: "Mr. Wheeler is a man of impressive personality," the reporter wrote: "A big fat man is Lloyd G. Wheeler, albeit said to be well informed. But whenever he has a stomach qualm he hitches his old white horse to his red-wheeled gig (Mr. Wheeler owned neither) and drives, post-haste, to Thirty-first street and Michigan avenue. There he lets out a war whoop, and his friend, 'Dr.' Dan Williams, sallies forth, grinning over the contemplated fee."

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Practically all my story was treated in like manner.

All the Negroes in Chicago who knew that I was in any way connected with the article became angry with me. I spent much time (and car fare) clearing up the situation with persons whom I had interviewed. When I returned to my work, I learned that the reporter who had gone over my "story" had been paid \$15 for it. I was given nothing for my hard work on it. I complained to Mr. Patterson, and finally asked him to give me a chance to be a reporter. The apparent ludicrousness of my request made him laugh outright.

"Why, James," he explained, "you can't expect us to pay for a story *twice*! And you should see that to add you to our reportorial staff would be quite unprecedented; quite unassuring. You already have a better job than the average coloured fellow of your age. Sensibly *stick* to it, by conducting it and yourself properly. I will say, however, that your matter was in good shape for our reporter to get at."

A bitter realisation crept over me—the *boding anathema of my colour*! And *then*—I expressed my feelings quite too bitterly. When I was paid on Saturday night, the cashier informed me that my place would thereafter be filled by another man. Yet the time came, a few years later, when I *did* sell news matter to the *Tribune*, at its usual space rates of six dollars a column. And with the *Daily News, Record*,

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Journal and *Times-Herald* (now the *Record-Herald*) I had exceptional success. Even editors, like other people, sometimes take up ideas slowly. I had to pay the price of *waiting*.

After losing my humble position in the counting-room, I was for a long time out of employment. The only work I could obtain was "waiting dinner meals" at lunch counters and in hotels. This I did from eleven until three o'clock daily, for three dollars a week and dinner. Many coloured men in Chicago still do this sort of work, as then, earning a meagre existence. I found it discouraging work. If one unfortunately broke a dish, the pretended "cost" of it was deducted from his wages. The scheduled charge for accidental breakage was:

Cup	10 cents
Saucer	10 "
Butter chip.....	5 "
Plate	10 "

It was a lucky waiter who did not thus forfeit a part of his wages every week. He was continuously on the jump. The floors were mostly of marble, and if a dish happened to drop, it was gone.

At one of the large hotels where I was employed—

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still one of the largest in Chicago—"dinner waiters" were fed like so many cattle. Meat, water and bread was all that was allowed us. We could not have butter, coffee nor vegetables. Always, when we had served dinner, we were formed into line and marched off to a bare, upper room, furnished only with long, bare, wooden tables and benches. On a smaller bare table, in a corner, were three-foot heaps of sliced bread, fresh and stale bread, mixed. We used to rush for and fight over the miserable food, like a drove of hogs. For he who was quickest and strongest got the best and most. The only meat allowed us was whatever had been scraped from the plates of the guests. This miserable treatment turned men into brutes and hypocrites, and really lost the house money. For often, just before the close of the dinner hours, a waiter would secure a fine order of meat from the cook, presumably for a guest, and then hide it away for his own dinner. No coloured boy would betray another in such case. I never practised this deception, but asked the waiters to join me in a protest to the management. They merely laughed at me, in brutal unconcern.

But it is a pleasure for me, even at this distance, to recount my experience in the Kohlsaats lunch counters. Mr. Kohlsaats, who had been a travelling salesman, was the originator, I think, of the quick lunch

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business. He had made a fortune out of it, and was rated as many-times a millionaire. He became the owner, eventually, of the *Inter Ocean* (which he soon resold) and bought the *Times-Herald* and the *Evening Post*. But he still retained his chain of lunch counters.

No one was charged for breakage in the Kohlsaats lunch counters. When I unfortunately broke almost a whole box of cups, nothing was taken from my wages. When dinner was over, the head waiter, an intelligent coloured man, would announce:

"Now, men, take seats around the lower end of the counter, and eat your dinners as decently as the guests. And eat all you want, and *anything* you want."

Such treatment enabled Mr. Kohlsaats to develop trustworthy men who strove to remain in his service. Nothing was wasted, nothing broken nor thrown away, if they could help it. His employées were seldom discharged and seldom quit. Many had grown old in his service. Mr. Kohlsaats established a small public library for the benefit of his coloured employées, and employed a well-educated coloured West Indian as librarian. It was also Mr. Kohlsaats's custom to give five dollars in gold each Christmas to any employé who would save as much as five dollars by that time. His "all-day men" received \$7 a week and their meals; his "dinner men," \$4 a week and their dinners. Din-

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ner men were free to secure extra work, such as caring for offices and the like. I cleaned a jewelry store on Madison street for a time for a Jewish lady.

Before going to the *Tribune*, I had done considerable amateur boxing. I now decided that, since there seemed to be no hope for me as a writer, I might as well become a professional pugilist. What folly to go to school, if one could not be what one wished! As for settling down permanently as a *scullion*——! Well—I took boxing lessons from the elder Harry Gilmore, then the cleverest lightweight boxer in America, and the former champion of his class. I was a large middleweight. Gilmore was one of the most modest and gentlemanly men I have ever known. About him there was no hint of his calling, save in the springy step and catlike quickness of his movements. Among his pupils who took lessons when I did were Tommy White, Jimmy Barry, Con Doyle and Frank Girard, all of whom became professional boxers of note, two attaining championships. I boxed exhibition bouts with "Texas" Casey, then one of the best middleweights in the Northwest, and with other noted boxers. But I did not box for money, nor indulge in evil habits. Professional boxing, with me, meant merely a means to an end. But I was destined never to enter it.

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When the first whisperings of racial antipathy spread into the North, and the daily press of the nation began prolonged editorial discussions of "the Negro," leading coloured men from all parts of the country, at the call of T. Thomas Fortune of New York, met in Chicago to discuss the situation. Fortune was then editor of the *New York Age*, a coloured weekly, and an editorial writer on the *New York Sun*, under Dana. Pledger of Georgia, ex-Governor Pinchback of Louisiana, Dancy of North Carolina, Knox of Indiana, Turner of Missouri, Judge Straker of Michigan, and a number of bishops and noted clergymen were among those who responded to the call. They formed an organisation known as The National Afro-American League, for the purpose of staying the onslaught against the race. For a week they were in session in the Madison Street Theatre in Chicago, the press of the entire country reporting their deliberations. The Northern press was especially favourable to the organisation, and the broader-minded papers of the South were tolerant. It was the first time that such an intelligent body of coloured men had met on American soil, and the influence of the meeting was almost nation-wide. It had much to do with the changed attitude of the press in reporting matters pertaining to coloured people, for it was the first public instance of setting forth the Negro in his newer light.

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On the last night of their meeting a literary programme and reception was given, and I was prevailed upon by private friends to read a poem of mine there. These patient, coloured friends had been pleading with me to stay out of the prize ring. I had replied: "If I knock a man out, I've *accomplished* something. If I write a poem, what's *that*? There's nothing for *me* in writing. I have no trade, and the only thing I can *do* is to fight."

I had thought that I was not wanting in courage, but I could not have walked upon the stage, nor uttered a word, had not "Tom" Fortune and my friends encouraged me. My knees shook and my voice trembled, as I faced that mingled sea of intelligent white and coloured faces. But, somehow, I got through. My poem was entitled "The Psalm of a Race." A bit of it held that each race has been

"Some other's sequel
In the Serial of Man."

And it contained the appeal:

"Bind us not; bar not; nor blight us.
Send, from summits where ye dwell,
Hopes, like torches, that may light us
From these labyrinths of hell."

Some one impulsively arose and proclaimed me "the coming poet of the race." (Dunbar, three years

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younger than I, was then unheard of.) My friends, unknown to me, had had copies of my poem printed on gilt-edged cardboard. These they distributed as souvenirs; and I was duly launched as "Chicago's coloured poet," at least for the time. The best coloured families in Chicago insisted upon "lionising" me—much to my discomfort. I could not well carry out my boxing programme under the circumstances. For *now* I felt that *that* would disgrace my race. Yet, my fortunes had not mended. My race could not employ me. My plans had all been upset, and I was at sea. I was discouraged over the present, and doubtful of the future, but I decided to try to work my way through school. I had forty dollars saved up in the bank, and I was but twenty-one. I was still waiting "dinner meals."

I was standing one day in front of a store window, thinking the situation over, when a woman glanced at me in passing, then turned and came back. It was my own aunt, my father's youngest sister. Neither of us had known the other was in Chicago. She had once lived in Evanston, Illinois, and promised that, if I would enter Northwestern University there she would see me over the roughest places until I could become self-supporting. I thanked her eagerly, and within a week set off for Northwestern. I had no definite idea for what profession I should try to prepare myself,

In Chicago and in a Northern University

but was anxious to be in school. I soon found work after school hours, and began to get nicely started. My aunt assisted me considerably during my first year, and Mr. Lloyd sent word that he would lend me \$100 yearly, if I needed it. I mowed lawns, gave boxing lessons, drove a cab and acted as caretaker of a club. In fact, did any sort of honest work to help me in school. During my second year I did not need outside assistance.

One day a white classmate who is now a Methodist minister informed me that arrangements had been made for me to address the ladies of the Evanston W. C. T. U. at "Union Hall." It was a complete surprise to me. As I was the only coloured student in Evanston at that time, the papers of the city made announcement of the matter, but inadvertently named two dates. So I was requested by the ladies to speak on both dates. This I did, speaking only a few moments on the first occasion.

The first Sunday, Miss Anna Gordon, Miss Willard's secretary, was present. On the second Sunday, Miss Willard herself was in the audience. At the close of my talk she shook hands with me, quietly, and I considered the incident closed. In fact, I thought no more about it, and went about my affairs as if it had never happened. I had always admired Miss Willard

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for her personal worth and work, but had never been so presumptuous as to entertain a thought of knowing her personally. My one curiosity concerning Miss Willard was: what on earth she came to hear me for.

A fortnight, perhaps, after my address in Union Hall I received a letter written in so bad a hand that I could hardly decipher it. It professed to be from Frances E. Willard and invited me to tea at "Rest Cottage," her home. I thought it purely a hoax which my schoolmates had put up on me. I determined to pay no attention to it. However, upon thinking the matter over, I decided, finally, to take the letter and go. "If it is merely a hoax," I reasoned, "the letter will explain to Miss Willard my presumption in calling. And if the invitation is genuine, I should respect it." But, even then, I would not venture to go until I had first consulted my aunt in Chicago about it, so greatly did I fear lest I should offend Miss Willard.

When I reached Miss Willard's residence, I was late. Miss Irene Fockler, cousin and personal secretary to Miss Willard, welcomed me at the door. "We are already at tea," she told me. "Come in."

They made me feel at home immediately. At the table were Frances E. Willard, her mother, "Saint Courageous," Miss Catharine Willard, a niece, Miss Gordon, and Miss Fockler.



Mr. Lloyd remained my steadfast friend. I was frequently a guest at his delightful home in Winnetka.



In Chicago and in a Northern University

"You are late," observed Miss Willard to me.

"Yes," I replied. "Miss Willard, have you never heard the story about my race?"

"No, my boy, I haven't," she said. "Please tell it."

"Well," I rehearsed, "the story tells how, when the Judgment trumpet blew, the white people got up immediately and went to Heaven. Two days after the Judgment was over, some angels scouting on the outposts of Glory, saw dense, black clouds arising, away to the west, and hurried back to give the alarm that a dreadful storm was approaching. 'Oh, no!' St. Peter reassured them, 'that's only the *coloured* people coming to Judgment.' So, you see," I explained, "I've lived up to the reputation of my race."

Miss Willard asked me of my parentage; of my earlier life and struggles; of my aims and studies; of how I got on; and of my religious views. She seemed particularly curious to know just what per cent of white and Indian blood I possessed; and who my Scotch ancestors were—as nearly as I could tell her. And then she asked for more Negro stories. She was the finest *listener* I ever met.

"I really can't *tell* a story *properly*," I explained.

"Neither can I," she said.

But she did tell what I thought was a good one. The conversation had turned to relating how certain unknown persons had sometimes been mistaken for

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famous people whom they were thought to resemble, when Miss Willard told of an Irishman who was mistaken for the greatest celebrity of all:

“ ‘As Oi sthorted t’ cloim th’ ladder wit’ me hod upan me shoulder, an’ me poipe in me mouth, me friend, Pat Whalen, thot Oi hadn’t seen fer tin months, come suddint ’roun’ th’ corner, an’, throwin’ up th’ two hands av him, sez he:

“ ‘ ‘Well, Howly MOSES! Is thot *you?*’ ” ”

A few months after my meeting with Miss Willard, through sickness and the consequent loss of the position upon which I most depended—that of caretaker of a club—I was obliged to leave school.

I went back to Chicago, and to waiting dinner meals again. I did not inform Miss Willard, nor any friends, but went quietly, in much discouragement. I had about decided to leave Chicago and try elsewhere, when it occurred to me that as a matter of common politeness, I ought to inform Miss Willard that I was no longer in school, nor in Evanston. This I did, stating that I was not certain yet as to where I should go, but that, “*like all driftwood,*” I should “lodge somewhere.” There was no hint of an appeal in my letter—merely an explanation of my leaving school. Almost by the next mail I received a letter from Miss Willard in which she said:

In Chicago and in a Northern University

"Come back to Northwestern; and come to see me at once. Arrangements are under way which will open the door for you."

She had secured me free tuition, and when I called at "Rest Cottage," she directed her secretary to help me further with funds. I insisted that this should be considered a loan; that when I became fully strong again, I should repay her all.

"No, my boy," she said, "you are not to repay it. *"All I have is given me of God to do good with. The only way in which you can ever pay me is by doing good to others."*

Some ten years later, when I was pastor of a church in New Jersey, a letter came to me from Miss Willard's cousin, then Mrs. Irene Fockler-Hallowell of Crested Butte, Colorado, from which the following is taken:

"I was exceedingly interested to read of you in the June number of *Pearson's Magazine*—indeed I have known nothing of your whereabouts since 1894. You have come to my thought very frequently during the years, however, and it was with much pleasure that I read of your work in behalf of your people. How well do I remember, as if it were yesterday, Miss Willard's great interest in you, and her belief in your future. Ah, those were dear days, those Rest Cottage days, and it is blessed to think that the privilege was ours of helping many a gifted young man to his rightful heritage. Dear Miss Willard is gone—as far away as Heaven. But I

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like to think that that is not far.—IRENE FOCKLER-HALLOWELL."

I have conversed with Miss Willard many times, but I never heard her denounce a saloonkeeper. She was the loving advocate of purity, *not* a denouncer of the wayward nor the sinning. When I first met Miss Willard I had just, from a public platform, spoken bitterly of the whites for their wrongs against my race. Very lovingly, by deed, and not by word, she taught me that the sweeter way was the better way.

IN THE SOUTH

CHAPTER V

IN THE SOUTH

ONE day at Northwestern I was called out of my classes upon the request of a stranger, an ebon giant with features gnarled almost like the roots of a wind-tossed oak. He informed me that he had just come from the presence of Frances E. Willard, and that he wanted me to go South with him that night. He was the Rev. Dr. Charles Nelson Grandison, then President of Bennett College at Greensboro, N. C. A coloured college president in those days meant *nothing* to me. There were so many who were merely ignorant frauds. But, as I conversed with this man, I was surprised to find him really a man of ability and culture. I was later to learn that he was verily "a prince in ebony," the most eloquent man, I think, to whom it has ever been my privilege to listen.

We walked down beside the lake together, and talked the matter over. He pictured to me the needs of our race in the South, and set forth his conviction that it was my duty to help my people in the South. But for every reason he gave for my helping *Southern*

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Negroes I brought forward one for my remaining in the North, and endeavouring to serve my race where I was. Northern Negroes, in my opinion, had been almost totally neglected, while practically all the money and sympathy of the Negro's Northern white friends had been directed into Southern channels. At last I attempted to close the discussion finally by boldly announcing my most guarded conviction that the race question would never be definitely settled in America; that the whites would *never* extend to us the full commercial and social privileges which other races enjoy here; that all we had suffered and done in this country was merely disciplinary and temporary, and that the Negro's *destiny* was AFRICA.

Grandison wheeled suddenly about, and grasped me by both shoulders. "I have found a brother spirit—*in the North!*" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "You must come South with me, where you *belong*. I want you to meet O'Connell and Chavis, brothers of my soul. I am in accord with you about Africa. It *is* our destination. For the Lord hath spoken it! Perhaps you and I, my brother, are to be instruments in His hand."

I was deeply impressed. And when Grandison confided to me that, in *his* opinion, Miss Willard was "burdened," I decided at once that it was my duty to leave Northwestern. I got my books, and together

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Grandison and I went to bid Miss Willard good-bye. I had no money for my fare; neither had she. In truth, Miss Willard seldom knew anything whatever about her own financial affairs. Miss Gordon, her secretary, had had full charge of such matters for several years. It was Miss Willard's custom, when she wanted cash, to inquire:

"Anna, is there anything in the bag?"

Upon this occasion there was found to be nothing.

"Well," said Miss Willard, "if you will pay the young man's fare, Dr. Grandison, I'll see that you are reimbursed."

So it was arranged. We left Chicago that night.

On our way we stopped off at Cincinnati and visited the M. E. Book Concern, where I met Dr. Hartzell, now Bishop Hartzell. I seemed to be moving in a new world. I had never before associated with so many sweet-spirited men. Everywhere about the Book Concern, everywhere we went among these Methodist ministers, there breathed a spirit of brotherly-love. Grandison was greatly respected among his white brethren; by coloured ministers he was idolised.

The South opened new and interesting vistas to me: The plantations, the mountain cabins, the wild streams and winding roads, the smaller cities, the ruined mansions, the former quarters of slaves, the creaking ox carts, the sad poverty of many whites and blacks, and

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the wide and bridgeless gulf between the races. In the South one *knows* he is a Negro—if he *is* one—the moment he enters “Dixieland.” Which is not to say that he is in *every* way worse treated than in the North, but rather that things are *different*—to a *Northern* Negro, *shockingly* different. In the North, he is often encouraged to aspire to any height, though seldom permitted to attain it. The South makes him few promises beyond the boon of becoming ordinarily useful, or of aspiring among his kind. The North promises what it *cannot* or *does* not fulfil; the South is not hypocritical, in this respect. In the North, an ambitious Negro bumps into the colour line unexpectedly, on the street cars, in hotels, theatres, parks, public buildings and schools, on trains, in pleasure resorts, or at the polls, and even in the church of Christ. Yet he may go a week or a year, sometimes, without meeting with any *unusually* humiliating experience. In the South he is given immediately and unmistakably to understand that he must get definitely on his side of the colour line, and *stay* there. In the North he understands that *legally* he may go where he pleases, and run the risk of an insult. In the South his status is plainly fixed by special legal enactments. “The roads he may not enter” and “the paths he may not tread” are plainly marked: “For WHITE People.” And his own path is labelled: “For COLOURED People.”

In the South

This is not figurative language, but literal truth. These "For COLOURED People" signs glare at the resident Negro and the coloured traveller in many public places, but especially in the street cars, "Negro Waiting Rooms," and from the "Jim Crow" cars.

At Knoxville, Tenn., Dr. Grandison and I were ordered, in no very polite manner, to "get into the Jim Crow car." Grandison protested vociferously that we were *interstate* passengers, with first-class tickets, and entitled by law to first-class accommodations. But at that time I had a great curiosity to see what a "Jim Crow" car was like, never having ridden in one. I had heard that Negroes and mules were sometimes made to ride in the same car, and I wanted to find out if this was true.

"Come on, Doctor!" I exclaimed. "Let's get right in."

"I know my *rights*!" Grandison contended. "We'll not be 'Jim Crowed'! We'll buy Pullman seats!"

"There are no Pullman seats left," claimed the Pullman conductor.

A rough hand was laid upon Grandison's shoulder. "Say! Git inter that cyar, *you*! Er——"

"Dey's plenty o' seats, Boss," whispered the Pullman porter slyly, edging past us. We got into the Pullman, bought seats, and remained there until we had entered North Carolina, which had, at that time,

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no separate-car laws. The conductor gave us no trouble. He fully realised that, having no legal grounds to stand upon, he could be reported to his superiors. Besides, he doubtless perceived that Grandison was no ordinary Negro, to be bullied. He was as nice to us as if nothing unpleasant had happened.

Greensboro lies in the beautiful "Piedmont district" of North Carolina. In the library of Bennett College, a "Freedmen's Aid" school located there, the late Judge Albion Tourgée wrote his famous book, "A Fool's Errand." It was in Greensboro, too, that Judge Tourgée, a Northern man, sentenced the first Southern white man ever hanged for the murder of a Negro. Upon the library table on which "A Fool's Errand" was written I have often pored over my lessons. The school is delightfully situated on a gentle eminence, flanked on the north and west by rolling hills and streams. The climate is delightful, and the air and water rarely pure and healthful. And, surely, there were never such sunrises and sunsets before! I got well without taking one single drop of medicine.

There is a decidedly religious atmosphere in the coloured schools of the South. Nearly all the students in Bennett were Christians. The school was co-educational, both sexes being about equally represented

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among the nearly two hundred students. I was surprised at the intelligence and character which I found among these students, few of whom had been brought up among environments favourable to their highest development. Yet, in all the history of Bennett there had never been a scandal, nor a single case of theft. The discipline was excellent, and the admiration which the student body and faculty felt for Dr. Grandison was simply unbounded. Board and tuition was \$50.00 a year. The food was cheap and plain, but wholesome. There were, however, some conditions which I considered drawbacks: Each student was required, without monetary recompense, to do one hour's work each day. This "hour" was sometimes stretched into two hours, or into an entire afternoon, consuming much of one's valued study time. I found, too, that some of the teachers were not always reliable in keeping their appointments with students. When I wanted special help with certain lessons, a teacher who promised to meet me at four o'clock, happening to be invited to a chicken dinner, did not come at all. I was disgusted with him for it. No white professor would have acted so. Another teacher who knew Greek and Sanskrit could not speak English properly. He invariably said "dis" and "dat" and mispronounced a number of common words. This was because of early environments which had bred habits of speech which he could not overcome.

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He appreciated good English, and could write it, but he could not so master his organs of speech as to articulate it purely. It seemed to me that, in this respect, his influence upon the students was most unfortunate. His Negro mannerisms and lapses of dignity also impressed me unfavourably. I had always abominated these things, and did not relish sitting under a man of this type. I made up my mind that, when the school year was over, it would be better for me to return to the North, even if I never went to school any more. *How* I was to return, I did not know. A Negro labourer's wages down there at that time averaged only from 40 to 75 cents a day; and work was rather scarce at that. Miss Willard had paid my fare and tuition. I could not ask her to do more. I secretly resolved that, if necessary, I would walk back.

While in Bennett, I taught President Grandison's classes gratuitously whenever he happened to be away soliciting funds in the North. I also taught physical culture without charge, in the college chapel, teaching the young men and women, alternately every other day. They had seen me swinging Indian clubs and, learning that I was willing to teach them gratuitously, they raised (though most of them were very poor) \$28.00 which they placed in my hands to purchase gymnastic equipment. I sent to Chicago for them, and purchased a wall machine, a punching bag and

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platform, and several pairs of Indian clubs and dumbbells. The faculty placed the chapel at our disposal. Thus a new department was inaugurated in the school. At that time, few coloured schools in the South had taken up athletics. I used to take the boys out on a three-mile run over the country roads, two or three evenings a week; and, at the request of the teachers, gave exhibitions in club swinging, bag punching and lifting. In one of the lower grades, the teacher of physiology invited me to pose in sleeveless boxing costume before her class, that they might, as she expressed it, "observe the development and play of the muscles." The enthusiastic enterprise of the school in athletic matters was remarkable.

Some of us who were among the more advanced students in Bennett organised a club which, in compliment of our names, we called "The Six Jims." It developed later that one of the "Jims" was a "*Robert*" (now the Rev. Dr. Robert E. Jones, editor of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, at New Orleans); but he was a fine fellow, and we let him stick. We gave a number of entertainments for the benefit of the school, and finally ventured as far away as High Point, N. C., nineteen miles distant. With the permission of the faculty, three young women students accompanied us on that occasion to assist in our programme. We

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appeared in the opera house before a mixed audience which taxed its capacity. My part on the programme was Indian club swinging and weight lifting, then quite a new feature in that part of North Carolina. We were treated everywhere with consideration and respect by the whites, and were repeatedly banqueted by the coloured people of the town. But, when we started back to Greensboro, a new phase of things confronted us.

Some of the coloured people of High Point had warned us that the depot agent there was not friendly to coloured people, and had enforced a rule—entirely of his own making—which compelled coloured people to purchase tickets at a window which he had set apart for their use, in a dirty, back room filled with freight. He called it “the niggers’ window.” His office, located in the centre of the depot, was accessible both from the regular waiting room on the one hand and the freight-befouled den on the other. We had been so nicely treated in High Point by other white people that we did not dream we would be required to go to this special window for tickets, especially since there was no law nor any railroad rule to sustain the agent in his personal whim.

“That rule is only worked on you coloured people *here*,” we told our High Point friends. “Why don’t you stand up for your rights?”

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"You'll see!" they asserted.

We entered the regular waiting room, and asked for tickets.

"Go 'round to the *niggers'* window!" exploded the agent indignantly.

We sent another and another of our young men, until all of us had received the same reply. Then we hit upon the expediency of fooling the agent by persuading one of our young women who was almost white to try.

"Go 'round to the niggers' window," commanded the agent, after glancing her over.

We boarded the train without tickets, recounting our experience to the conductor.

"I'm sorry," he sympathised, "but I'll have to charge you all extra fares."

We protested that, under the circumstances, we considered this an added injustice to us.

"You'll either pay the extra fares or get off and walk," the conductor declared.

"Then we'll walk," we said.

We were put off fourteen miles from Greensboro. The girls wanted to walk with us; but we paid the extra fares for them.

It was almost dark when we arrived at the school, a pretty tired set of young men. The college was ablaze with lights to welcome us; and almost the entire

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school, students and faculty, came running out to meet us. The girls had spread the news of our misadventure. To our surprise, we were hailed as "young heroes for the race." We were given supper in the teachers' dining-room with the faculty, the students vying for the honour of waiting upon us. After supper a meeting was held in the chapel, and stirring speeches were made by members of the faculty. But, "to my exceeding great surprise," the most fiery and impassioned discourse of all was made by the professor of the infelicitous speech. The occasion, merely a pause in the sad story of our race, had given him a tongue. With rolling eyes and quivering face, he cried:

"Let us say to the whites who would impede our progress and trample us in the mire: '*The nobility of my house begins in me; yours ends in you!*'" He seemed at that moment noble. I could not help thinking of the long trail behind him—his almost epic struggle from the position of an ox-cart driver to a college professorship! It was a revelation and a prophecy.

A prominent white lawyer was consulted about our difficulty with the agent in High Point, a white lawyer known to be friendly to our race.

"You have a most excellent case, and could win it—if *you were white*," he said. "My advice is: Don't. You will be misunderstood, and will only hurt your

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race. Write to the president of the railroad company, stating the facts courteously and without exaggeration, and you will hear from him."

We accepted this advice and wrote accordingly, and received a reply from the president, expressing his regret, and assuring us that the agent in question had been instructed to discontinue his unwarranted treatment of the road's coloured patrons. Perhaps we had not walked in vain.

There was not much Negro prejudice in Greensboro—far less, in fact, than in many cities in the North. I have seen wealthy Southern white gentlemen lift their hats on the street to Mrs. Grandison, who was a woman of unmixed African blood, though college bred. There was no colour discrimination in the depot at Greensboro, nor on the trains; and Greensboro's white business men were careful to advertise—on billboards and in the papers: "Courteous treatment to all." Doubtless much of this good feeling between the races in Greensboro was due, in no small measure, to the fine spirit of Bennett College and the splendid class of students there. The whites of the city sometimes brought their friends to look the school over, and Northern whites were also its occasional visitors.

Among the Bennett students whom I personally knew and who have risen to useful places in life are Prof. James Reynolds, president of a college in Waco,

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Texas, and a poet of ability; Rev. Noble E. Steward, an M. E. minister; the Rev. Dr. Scott, the editor already referred to; James E. McGirt, poet and former publisher of *McGirt's Magazine*; the Rev. James Faust, a former missionary to Africa; Dr. James Bullock, a physician (now deceased); the Rev. C. I. Withrow, and a number of others less known.

One of the most impressive and learned coloured ministers in the South at that time was the Rev. P. O'Connell, Grandison's friend, in Greensboro. Southern white men sometimes took their families to hear him. He used English beautifully, and also spoke German and French. He was a graduate of Atlanta University. He has since graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and has held professorships both in Howard and Atlanta universities. His was the most musical voice I have ever heard. It was like the voice of a refined Brahman—like water heard far down among rocks. Bennett students went every Sabbath morning in a body to hear him; and considered it a special privilege if, individually, they sometimes obtained permission to hear him at night. Only once did I seek this special permission, and it was granted. But, coupled with my honest desire to hear Rev. O'Connell, there was another reason: a quadroon girl of flower-like beauty with whom I fancied I was deeply and seriously impressed. It was a mile from her house to

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the church. (She was a Greensboro girl, but attended the college.) It was sprinkling rain a little, but she graciously decided to go. I did my very best to be entertaining, but I was a novice at Cupid's game; and she found me a dismal failure.

"What do you *think?*" she told some girl friends afterwards. "He walked to church with me—a mile and back—through the rain, under an umbrella, in the night; *and never kissed me!*"

At the end of the school year, I wrote Miss Willard of my intention to return to the North. She immediately sent me my fare, and arranged with the Lloyds that I should be their guest until I obtained work. I soon did so; and in the fall re-entered Northwestern.

It was some years after this that a catastrophe came into the life of Grandison—a holocaust of trouble so great that over it not even his enemies rejoiced. It was that catastrophe which sometimes comes into the lives of good men; which John G. Woolley fought and went down under, but at last rose gloriously, to warn others; it was the foe under whose frailings John B. Gough fell, and of which he said: "When you have conquered *that*, you have conquered the most subtle enemy of man"; it was the demon foe to whose overthrow Miss Willard had dedicated her saintly life—the RUM demon, whose open enemy *Grandison* had been all the years of his public life.

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But there was a *reason* BACK of it all: Grandison, who upon the public platform seemed "A Prince in Black," noble and masterful as Frederick Douglass, sagacious as Booker Washington, as correct and courteous as Dunbar, with a ruggedness all his own, was boundlessly ambitious. The grandson of an African king, he was desirous of founding in Africa a Christian Negro republic which would work in harmony with the whites of America toward what he considered the only true solution of the race problem—the removal of the race from America, with the assistance and good will of the United States, and establishing it in Africa where the blacks might work out their own salvation, with love and gratitude in their hearts toward their benefactors, the American whites. This was Grandison's long-cherished dream. He believed in it to the very centre of his being—wished to live and die for the development of this idea. As, one by one, he saw the European nations possessing themselves of what he considered his fatherland, he grew restive and desperate under the thought that he was forever doomed to be "*nothing but an American Negro*," one of a helpless and despised race—a thing held down, apart, and hopeless. 'It was not the mere liquor, nor the bestial drunkenness he loved. 'Twas a Lethe-draught he sought, as he staggered brokenly under the black shadow that rests upon a race.

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I have seen him homeless and hungry, deserted of those who had lived upon his bounty, an outcast shunned by lesser men; I have seen him after he had been beaten by policemen's clubs, and taken to prison, but I have *never* seen him unmanly nor dishonest; nor have I ever seen him when he was not trying to rise to his better self again, as Gough and Woolley did.

One day on a train, near Newark, N. J., an old gentleman of beautiful refinement asked permission to share my seat. It was so unexpected a thing for a white man to do, in these later days, that I was quite astonished, especially as he was a man of evident culture and wealth, and there were other vacant seats in the coach. After we had conversed a little while, he asked me quietly:

"Do you know Grandison?"

"Yes," I replied, "I do. We are friends."

Then he related to me how he had heard Grandison speak in the Central Y. M. C. A. in New York a few years before. "How regal; how masterful an orator!" he exclaimed. "I have never heard his like! Magnetic, eloquent, logical; a brilliant rhetorician, storming, flashing, building awing climaxes, or painting, with pathetic tenderness, the story of the Cross, he stood forth a colossal ebon figure, moving and melting the hearts of men at will. In his magnificent peroration, an apostrophe to liberty, he brought his audience

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to its feet—every mother's *man* of us!—in gaping astonishment. It was a privilege to hear him!"

In all my race, which has known so much of sorrow, I know of no other story so sad; nor figure so pathetically noble as Grandison's.

In more recent years I have pastored churches in the South, and have frequently ridden in "Jim Crow" cars and on the "Jim Crow" side of steamboats. For there are river steamers running into Washington and Baltimore on which white and coloured passengers are kept separated by an invisible line running the length of the boat. Placards placed at convenient intervals set forth the humiliating restriction: "THIS SIDE FOR COLOURED PASSENGERS." A white passenger who unthinkingly crosses the invisible dead line is corrected apologetically by the steamboat watchman; a Negro who ignorantly does so is stormed at profanely. But it is only just to say that not all Southern steamboat lines practise this discrimination against coloured people. Sometimes two different boats owned by the same company will vary widely in their treatment of coloured passengers: on one boat they may be restricted entirely to one side, while on the other there may be absolutely no restraint. The matter is left largely to the discretion of the captain. His attitude and opinion will shade down perceptibly through the entire crew.

On some river steamboats coloured passengers are



Grandfather was devoutly religious. He was much beloved by both white and coloured people for his kindness of heart, industry and honesty. He was Scotch-Irish and Indian.



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not permitted to rent a state-room unless it is directly under the booming whistle, or beside the noisy paddle-box, or the hot, smelling pantry, where it is almost impossible to sleep. Yet the cost of such a room is the same as for a comfortable one. I have been put into state-rooms which were pitch dark in the day time, and charged a dollar for their use, though no light would be allowed me until after night-fall. At other times I have had rooms with plenty of light, but they were always under the whistle, or beside the pantry, paddle-box, or toilet-room. State-rooms which are rented to coloured passengers on these boats are *never* rented to white people. They are distinctively "*Negro*" state-rooms. The whites would not put up with such accommodations, though they pay no more for the better rooms they enjoy.

Some separate cars, especially those on the Norfolk & Western road, are as clean and commodious as the coaches reserved for white people. Even a smoking room is provided. But too frequently the separate Negro compartments are without water, poorly ventilated, small and dirty. Coloured men and women are often required to use the same toilet-rooms; and white men, passing through the Negro car, frequently light their cigars and smoke in the presence of coloured women. Usually only half a baggage car is partitioned off for the use of coloured passengers; and over

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two or three seats of that the train's newsboy will audaciously spread his magazines, papers, and candy, and then sit down on half a seat himself, though coloured passengers are compelled to stand. The conductor will coolly occupy two or three additional seats, checking up his accounts, unperturbed by the discomfort of his passengers. More than once I have stood up while conductors sat, and more than once I have ridden weary miles without one drop of water. There was plenty of drinking water on the train, but none in the Negro compartment. Once a kind conductor allowed me to go into the white people's car to get a drink.

White people, however, are not entirely to blame for the bringing about of these conditions in the South. Rowdy Negroes often board the trains, full of bad liquor, and bent upon a fight. They sit down and drink more whiskey, lurch through the car, insult respectable coloured women and men, and make themselves not only nuisances but positively dangerous, lurching and obscenely cursing, with pistol or knife in hand. It is no wonder that white Southern legislators have sought by prohibitive laws to protect their own men and women from such disgusting and dangerous displays of black savagery as this. Nevertheless, it is manifestly unfair to compel decent and intelligent coloured people to be herded in a car with such crea-

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tures, unprotected, without human accommodations, and insulted by every ruffian on the train, whether white or black, simply because their faces are dark.

It is in travelling, chiefly, that a Negro meets with his most discouraging treatment in the South. In the communities where they live, self-respecting Negroes are usually better treated in the South than in the North. They are trusted, employed, encouraged, advised and helped forward in every practical way; and there is often a sincere cordiality, even love, existing between the races which is difficult to describe. An industrious, respectable Negro in the South (particularly if he is a minister) may borrow any reasonable amount of money from a bank on his own mere word, or note, without other security. And any imputation against his character is taken up by white men who know him as a personal affront. Southern white men will stand by and co-operate with Northern Negroes who go South, without "big-headedness," to build up their own people; and to do right. I shall never forget the good white people of Lexington, Va., where I pastored a coloured church, who stood by me in my work, shaming refractory spirits in my congregation, and seeing that I was paid; and who, when I left, sent with me their blessings and written commendations. And the same was true of the whites of Westmoreland County, Va., where I also pastored a church. The ex-

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periences of hundreds of coloured ministers and leaders in the South would corroborate mine.

At this period of its development, conditions are still far from ideal for my people in the South. But this is also becoming more and more true in the North, where, in the larger cities, the idle Negro, shut out from the commonest employment and living more uncertainly than a rat, is a sight for men and gods to pity—or *despise!* The North judges the South too much by its “fire-eaters,” and not enough by its peaceful, kind hearts who are helping my people, and who are loved of them. I have never had an unkind word spoken to me in the South by a white man who knew me personally.

DUNBAR AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS
..... JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.



CHAPTER VI

DUNBAR AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS
. . . JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

THE hard times which the working classes in Chicago experienced during the winter following the World's Fair form an unforgettable period in the lives of coloured Americans who lived in Chicago at that time. The opening of the Fair had brought a rush of labourers and dependents into the city whom normal conditions, even in that pushful, lusty place, could not readily assimilate. The "Debs Railroad Revolution," which occurred after the Fair, added to the burden of the poor. It was a time of "soup houses," "bread lines"; of "Coxey's armies" and idleness, and of suffering and starvation among the poor of every race, for whom the late Wm. T. Stead, then in Chicago, lifted up his voice in appeal and weeping. It was during this period that I was married to Miss Fannie Clemens, the daughter of a coloured Methodist minister in Chicago, and shortly afterward went into newspaper work.

Several months before I was married I had had the honour of meeting Frederick Douglass, the great Ne-

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gro Commoner, who during the World's Fair had represented the Negro Republic of Hayti in the capacity of its Commissioner at the World's Columbian Exposition. A little prior to the Fair I had become acquainted with Paul Laurence Dunbar, the poet, who acted as Douglass's secretary during the Fair.

Like some other young coloured men of those times, I had not been a very warm admirer of Douglass, and did not become so until after I had met him personally. I had felt that his strong (and, as I *then* thought, *blind*) affiliation with the Republican Party made him a potent tool of that party in corraling the coloured vote, and rendered his leadership of the race far other than altruistic. It was in this sceptical frame of mind that I went for a Chicago coloured paper to interview Douglass at the Palmer House. But the moment I stood in Douglass's presence, I seemed to feel the greatness of his spirit, and every preconceived notion of him vanished, like mist, before he had spoken a word. I realised instantly how my opinion of Douglass had wronged him. I *knew* that I stood in the presence of a great, far-seeing, noble, unselfish man.

At the close of our interview, Douglass asked me if I could direct him to the office of Messrs. Barnett and Williams, coloured lawyers. I volunteered to show him. As we walked through the busy streets together, Douglass, who was a giant in size, and with

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long, white hair that fell down upon his massive shoulders, was soon recognised and repeatedly cheered by white men, some of whom stood with bared heads while Douglass passed. The thought was forced upon me that the whites, in spite of colour line and caste, recognise moral greatness and courageous might which sanely and persistently become the embodiment of a living Cause. I conceived the idea afterward of giving Mr. Douglass a great Farewell Public Reception which would be consistent with his dignity, and which would give all classes of my race an opportunity to show that they honoured him as truly as did the whites; and to pour out their gratitude to him for all he had accomplished in their behalf. I wondered, when I came to think it over, why such a thing as a public testimonial of gratitude had never been given to him by his race in all his life. I talked the matter over with Mr. Douglass, and obtained his consent to my plan. "We young people in Chicago are going to honour you," I told him, "as you never were honoured before."

"O Corrothers," he replied laughingly, in that lion-like voice of his, "you *don't* know how *much* of that I can stand!"

But, with acrimonious and despicable jealousy, the older coloured "leaders" in Chicago, judging me by themselves, and fearful either that I sought to attain

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to their "leadership"; or to make some money in which *they* would not share, or, by ingratiating myself into the favour of Douglass, obtain, through his influence, some political job in Washington upon which they had fastened their greedy eyes, set themselves resolutely to fight the plan. To forestall it, they gave a "select" reception to which only the "coloured élite" of Chicago were invited. Then they endeavoured to dissuade Douglass from attending the church on the night which had been set apart in his honour. This failing, they secretly got into the good graces of the new pastor of Quinn Chapel, the largest coloured church in the Northwest, in which the exercises were to be held, and exacted from the minister a promise not to permit the affair to take place in his church.

I had given up my position, and had devoted an entire month to working up the affair. I had secured some of the most representative white and coloured people then in Chicago, not only Chicago citizens, but noted visitors to the Fair as well, to participate in the programme. When, almost at the last moment, I learned that the use of the church was to be withheld, I went indignantly to the minister, and stated to him the consequences of such action, from *my* point of view:

"Some of the leading people of this city and elsewhere are on the programme," I said, "and hundreds



It was not until I had attained manhood, and had really become acquainted with my father, that I knew he had never intended to harm a hair in my head. My Step-mother is with my Father.



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of people are coming here to-morrow night to honour the greatest man in our race. If we cannot have this church, it will be nobody's fault but yours. And I will stand on the church steps and tell the people so!"

That settled it. The Farewell Reception was accordingly given. The daily papers, particularly the *Daily News* and the *Inter Ocean*, made special announcements of the affair, and the church was crowded, hundreds being turned away. I have since learned that among those who sat in the audience that night was Ray Stannard Baker, now Associate Editor of *The American Magazine*, who suggested the writing of this autobiography. The reception was a labour of love for all who took part in it. Nothing was charged for, and there was no admission fee and no collection taken. Not a penny was made by any one out of the affair. A white publisher printed 1,000 programmes free; a wealthy coloured woman put her carriage at the disposal of Mr. Douglass on the night of the reception; a coloured caterer donated a five-course banquet for thirty people; coloured singers who could command as much as \$25 and \$50 a night volunteered, free, and there were several three-minute speakers: the late Dr. P. S. Henson, then pastor of the First Baptist Church in Chicago, spoke on "An Anglo-Saxon's View of Douglass"; Mrs. Daisy H. Carlock, vice-president of the Illinois State W. C. T. U., and Mrs.

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Matthews, then prominent in temperance work in London, England, told of the esteem in which Douglass was held by temperance workers everywhere; and the late Dr. John Alexander Dowie, the founder of Dowieism, though not asked to be on the programme, recited briefly the honour in which Douglass was held in Scotland and Australia. R. B. Cabbell, President of the Coloured Waiters' Union, told why working coloured men loved and revered Douglass; a coloured doctor represented the coloured doctors on the programme; a minister, the coloured ministers; Mrs. Agnes Moody, a well-known aged coloured woman, read a thoughtful paper on "The Mothers of the Race," while Fannie Clemens, my future wife, read a biographical sketch of Mr. Douglass. J. D. Bryant, Superintendent of the largest coloured Sunday School in the North, told "Why the Children Love Douglass," and S. Lang Williams, a leading coloured lawyer whose guest Douglass had been during his stay in Chicago, paid a glowing tribute to the character of Douglass on the subject, "Douglass, by His Lawyer-Host." A number of special songs were written for the occasion and sung by a special chorus led by a coloured actress, one of the well-known "Meredith Sisters"; and a white octogenarian singer, George W. Clark, who happened to be visiting in Chicago at the

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time, and who had often sung in anti-slavery meetings where Douglass had spoken before the war, was present and sang as a surprise to Douglass. It was after midnight when Douglass arose to reply to the speeches, but the audience was not weary.

The *Chicago Inter Ocean* the next morning reported the affair, in part, as follows:

"Fraught with complacency and big with the fulfilment of his most sanguine dreams must have been the reflections of Frederick Douglass as he sat on the platform of Quinn Chapel last night, while, one after another, cultivated, educated and intelligent coloured men and women arose, and in words whose eloquence evidenced their sincerity, gave voice to their race's devotion to the great apostle of Negro enlightenment. These were the people whom a few short years ago he found in chains, debased, like dumb, driven cattle, and now as his footsteps tended toward the grave, and the shadows of eternity deepened around him, he left them equipped, mentally and morally, to battle for themselves, and to render service to humanity. If all the other moments of his great life had known nothing but disappointment, and unhappiness, the few hours last night when he was enabled to realise the success which has attended the work to which his many years have been given up would have been sufficient compensation.

"The ample seating capacity of Quinn Chapel, Twenty-fourth street and Wabash avenue, was taxed to its utmost by an audience made up largely by the leading coloured people of Chicago, with a liberal sprinkling of prominent white people to tender Frederick Douglass farewell on the eve of his departure from Chicago where he has spent the last seven months as Commissioner to the World's Fair from Hayti.

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Long before Mr. Douglass arrived every seat in the church had been taken, and his appearance was the signal for loud and continuous applause. When Mr. Douglas was seated in the centre of the platform, and the other speakers grouped themselves around him, the exercises were opened by singing the hymn, 'Blest Be the Tie That Binds,' participated in by the entire audience."

The *Inter Ocean* closed its account of the meeting with a stenographic report of Douglass's remarks on that occasion, from which I quote the following paragraphs:

"I can only say to you," said the aged orator, "that I am profoundly gratified for the sentiments expressed by the speakers to-night. But I do not feel elated by these eulogistic references to myself. To-night I have been contemplating not my greatness, but my littleness. For myself I claim nothing; for my Cause, everything. Of course I feel grateful that the conflict of 1863 has made possible such a scene as this, and my thanks go out to God for the wonderful change in our condition since the beginning of my efforts for emancipation.

"My beginning was as lowly probably as anybody's ever was. I fought with a dog daily in my childhood for crumbs of bread. I had no mother to caress me; no friend to console me; no bed even in which to sleep. To satisfy the pangs of hunger I had a few grains of corn roasted in the ashes. The contrast between that time and my present condition seems incredible. Forty-eight years ago I was advised to flee from the United States. My master had obtained information of my whereabouts, and such was the state of the laws at that time that in all this broad land there was no city so

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populous, no valley so deep, no mountain so high that I, in attaining them, could hope to elude those human blood-hounds, the slave catchers."

Speaking of the present conditions he said: "If the American people continue to tolerate the murders of Negroes, there will come a day of vengeance. Beware how you pinion the arms of black men, tread ruthlessly upon human breasts and scourge with cruel hands your brothers. God lives; and as a nation sows, so shall it reap."

At the time of my marriage, a few months later, I received a letter from Douglass which read:

"CEDAR HILL, ANACOSTIA, D. C., Feb'y 13, 1894.

My dear Mr. Corrothers:

I thank you sincerely for your letter and the valuable clippings containing specimens of your verse. I am more than glad to observe the progress of such young men as yourself and Paul Dunbar in literature, and especially in poetry. If we are ever to receive consideration as a people in this country, it will arise out of the fact that we can point to such aspiring young men as yourself. I can never despair of the future of our people while I can point to such noble and virtuous young men as yourself. I remember with pleasure the reception given me in Quinn Chapel, and the noble part you bore in that demonstration. In fact, I think you were the prime mover in getting it up. Yes, my dear Sir, go out, launch out, and gather strength from the greatness of the work before you. I am sure you will improve by work, and will be sustained in your good work. Heaven help you is my prayer for you and the dear partner you have just taken to your heart and home.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS."

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A few weeks after I was married, I entered newspaper work, not merely because I liked it, but because I wanted work, work of *any* sort, and there was practically none to be had, owing to the hard times in Chicago. I had made a few previous attempts at reporting, but had not succeeded. Now I tried more determinately and persistently. I studied the papers carefully, and decided that I could do the work. I wrote a news story, but not having the courage to offer it to an editor, my wife, who was quite a little business woman, marched down and sold it to the *Daily Record* for \$3.00. This was the first money I ever earned by writing. I wrote other news "stories," and disposed of most of them to the *Record* and the *Daily News* at their regular space rates—\$6.00 a column.

But the telling of this sounds easier than it really was. Editors were often snappish or profanely blustrous and meanly disposed toward me. They did not take kindly to a coloured writer's bothering around their offices so much. Yet, because I had, to some extent, learned *news values* and how to set them down on paper, they usually bought my stuff. Gradually they became more kindly disposed. I learned to study *them* as well as news values. I grew to know the best hours for submitting my work; when to be jovial with an editor and when to be merely business-like. And I

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learned, too, that whenever a reporter's veracity is doubted, he is of no earthly use to a newspaper. I learned that in this way:

A very popular song which was then being sung and whistled everywhere was the joint product of two Negroes—Gussie L. Davis, who had written it, and a Negro minstrel who had popularised it, and whom I shall call “Bobby” Winters, because that was not his name. I triumphantly proclaimed my discovery through the *Daily News*, in a three-quarter-column “story.” I thought the two song writers would be delighted. Davis was, but “Winters” wasn't, as he was then passing for a white man—a thing I had not known. He indignantly wrote the editor, through his lawyer, that there was not a drop of Negro blood in his veins; and he submitted his family pedigree (on his *father's* side) to prove it. He demanded a prompt denial from the paper and an admission of deliberate lying from the reporter—*me*. The editor published his letter, and sent for me. Within six hours I had submitted undeniable proof of the absolute truthfulness of my story. My editor was satisfied, and we heard no more of the hinted law suit.

When I first began to “do space” for the *Daily News*, its cashier, a bright young woman, was most intolerant of me. She used to slam the amount of my checks at me in a way which showed me plainly that

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she had no use for my race. I did not resent it, and soon she became quite pleasant toward me.

Eugene Field, the poet, was connected with the *Record* when I first began to write for it, but I never became acquainted with him. Not long afterward he passed away, to the great sorrow of the newspaper fraternity and of those who loved him as a man and as a writer.

When I began to "do space" on the *Chicago Journal*, Finley Peter Dunne, afterwards author of the "Dooley" stories, was a "space writer" there. I remember him well. A middle-sized, well-set man of perhaps thirty, quiet, smooth-shaven and modest, he was quite friendly toward me. He was a thorough newspaper man. He was permitted usually to sign his name to whatever he had in the *Journal*. The *Journal* paid but five dollars a column, deducted for pictures, head-lines and subheads; but Dunne's weekly checks were usually pretty fair-sized ones. He was not a regular man, merely a "space writer," and the editors sometimes complained that his "stuff" was "too long." Though a good newspaper man and a fine fellow, there was nothing about him in those days to indicate the brilliant future which so soon was to be his. He began his "Dooley" stories in the *Journal*, selling them at the usual space rates. It was not long before there was a demand for them in the leading maga-

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zines, and the droll philosopher of the "Archie Road" became a household favourite.

A "Grace Duffle Boyland" (but, surely not the lady who writes *now* under that name) was the leading woman writer on the *Journal* when I wrote for it. I remember how at times she graciously encouraged me when anything in my work appealed to her as being worth while. It was while writing for the *Journal* that I began to do Negro dialect. And it happened in this way:

I had always detested Negro dialect as smacking too much of "*niggerism*" which all intelligent coloured people detest. But, with the advent of Dunbar, in whose stories and poems Negro dialect attained a new dignity and beauty, my eyes were opened to the fact that here was splendid material which I had overlooked, and which all Negroes but Dunbar had allowed to go begging. With Dunbar's success, Negro dialect became popular in literature. I saw, after I had read a few of his pieces, that certain thoughts could not be expressed so well in any other way as in dialect. But I firmly resolved that, if I ever wrote dialect, I should not imitate Dunbar, but form a style of my own.

I had never written a news story which was not absolutely true; but, in the dead of winter, during a dearth of news, with expenses to be met and the re-

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sponsibility of a wife and little son upon me, I began to reason that it would not be *very* wicked to "make up" something *harmless* and sell it. For *that*, I reassured myself, was what successful literary men did. So I pretended to have discovered a Negro poet in the Chicago levee district who had organised among the levee denizens a literary society which he had named "The Black Cat Club," in honour of the club's mascot, a gigantic black cat named "Mesmerizer." At the end of my story I supplied a dialect poem which I attributed to the club's president, "Sandy Jenkins." The stuff was accepted and printed by the *Journal*, and, to my surprise, my name was signed to it. I felt quite apprehensive over this, not knowing whether to regard it in the light of a compliment or as an exposé of what the editor considered my unblushing perfidy. But I was greatly relieved when both the city and managing editors came and congratulated me.

"It's good stuff," said the managing editor, "and we want you to write something about that fellow every week."

"But he doesn't exist!" I confessed. "I—I made the whole thing up," I explained.

"Oh, we *knew* that!" declared the editors. "But make up some more. We'll help you with the dialect," they added when I admitted that I didn't know much about that.

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They gave me a book in dialect so that I might study that form of speech. Soon I began to like dialect work. And so were written my stories of "The Black Cat Club," which a New York firm published afterward in book form. But I have grown to consider the book a very poor one, and regret exceedingly that it was published.

During my newspaper experience in Chicago, I visited Indianapolis for the purpose of securing material for a "story" about the coloured people of Indianapolis which I wished to submit to the editor of the "out of town edition" of the *Chicago Record*. The editor, a young Mr. Field, a cousin of Eugene Field, had been kind enough to take several articles from me, and I hoped that he might care for such an article as I might write about the coloured people of Indianapolis. In this I was not mistaken, for Mr. Field graciously accepted my work.

While in Indianapolis, I was determined, if possible, to see two things: the cottage in which Benjamin Harrison and his wife had started house-keeping and James Whitcomb Riley, the poet whom I almost idolized. My wife and I had read of the early struggles of the Harrisons; of how they had started house-keeping on five dollars a week—often *borrowed* dollars—and I promised her that I would try to find the place. And

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I could not *think* of missing such an opportunity to see Riley!

I searched diligently, and enquired, but found no trace of the Harrisons' early home. Therefore, I turned my steps toward "Lockerbie street," where Riley lived, and of which he had sung:

"Such a dear, little street it is."

Lockerbie street is, as I remember it, a short one, nestled away in a quiet nook, not very far from the business district of the city. It was somewhat like some quiet and very respectable street on the upper West Side in New York. The Riley residence stands on a slight elevation, and the lawn is terraced and well-kept. The house itself is a large, comfortable, old-fashioned, square, red brick, with a hallway in the centre of it.

It was early autumn, but the screen-doors had not yet been removed, and the heavier hall door behind it being open, one caught a slight glimpse of the interior as one approached.

It was delightfully quiet.

I rang the bell, and a *coloured butler* answered the door.

This was my first surprise. *A coloured butler!*—in a *poet's* house! I was prepared for nearly anything.

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The butler showed me politely into the parlour, and announced that "Mr. Riley would see me presently."

Now came my next surprise: A cheery fire was burning in the open grate, and the butler explained that it was a *natural gas fire*! Well! thought I, "*à natural gas fire in a poet's house!*"

My *next* surprise was in Mr. Riley himself. He did not *look* like a poet! A square-built, well-dressed, middle-sized man, with rather a prominent nose—he looked like a quiet business-man! There was no hint of the poet about him!—unless it was in the clear, steady eyes that seemed to search one's soul and in the pleasant voice which seemed capable of great dramatic expression.

Riley greeted me pleasantly, and upon learning that I had literary ambitions, he became sincerely interested, and his face lit up with a pleasant surprise.

I told him something of my newspaper work, and he appeared interested, but asked:

"What more serious work have you done?"

I showed him a poem on Frederick Douglass which he took the time to read carefully. Then he remarked:

"Mr. Corrothers, that reads all right to *me*. What you *want* now is grit enough to make the whole world say what *I've* just said. Make it say of what you write, and you stick to it until it *does* say it: '*That reads all right to me!*' "

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The Douglass poem which Riley liked is too long to quote, but I give one stanza :

“With kingly power that spurns aside
All colour, tongue and clime,
He rang the deep bells of the soul—
A wild, melodious chime !
He scaled the heights of argument
Where blackest boulders frown,
Flung wide the gates of eloquence,
And poured the sunlight down !”

The next day I met Mr. Riley again on the street, in the business section of Indianapolis, and he stopped for a brief, pleasant chat.

In 1912, when I was pastoring in Haverhill, Mass., at the time when the poet was first stricken in health, I felt constrained to write him a letter of sympathy, suggesting that he try the “Chiropractic treatment.” I said nothing whatever about my literary work. It was purely a letter of sympathy.

In reply, I received a letter from Mr. Edmund Eitel, a relative of Mr. Riley’s, which follows :

“James Whitcomb Riley, Indianapolis.

March 23, 1912.

DEAR MR. CORROTHERS :

Mr. Riley was glad to get your letter and appreciated it. He has a cousin who is a doctor in a Chiropractic school and has been corresponding with him about the matter. Mr.

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Riley thanks you for your kind letter, and compliments you upon the verse you have been writing.

Very sincerely yours,

EDMUND EITEL."

Dear, gentle, gracious Riley! Can it be true that he is gone? Are all his flooding melodies hushed forever, and the sweet numbers still? His living presence is gone, but his memory and his songs remain.

"I can not say, and I will not say
That he is dead. He's just away."

It was shortly before I began to do newspaper work that I met Paul Laurence Dunbar. Our acquaintance ripened into a friendship which lasted until his death. He was not, when I first met him, in any sense famous, though he had attracted some little attention in certain parts of the Middle West through his two books of poems, "Oak and Ivy" and "Majors and Minors," the first of which was printed at his own expense in his home town, Dayton, Ohio; and the second, through the assistance of two white friends, in Toledo. In the eyes of many personal friends, Dunbar was at this time the most gifted young man of his race; but to the general public he was unknown. The great majority of his own race had never heard of him, and but few Negroes who had heard of him in any sense appreciated his worth to his race or could have

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been persuaded that so remarkable a literary career as was his awaited him. Wm. Dean Howells, himself an Ohioan by birth, who later introduced Dunbar to the literary world, had not at that time even *heard* of the struggling Negro poet whose literary sponser he was ere long to become.

It was my good fortune and pleasure to "write up" Dunbar twice during this period of his literary uncertainty, once in the *Chicago Journal*, over my name, and again in the *Chicago Times-Herald*, now the *Record-Herald*. The *Journal* sketch was nearly a column long, while the *Times-Herald* article covered almost two columns. With each write-up there was a picture of Dunbar, who acknowledged the appearance of the articles with a grateful note. Perhaps a year after this, Howells graciously brought Dunbar to the attention of the English-speaking world, and I, in common with all my race, was proud of the splendid literary position which Dunbar had so soon attained. The sudden elevation of Dunbar did not spoil our friendship. Between us there was never a thought of jealousy. He seemed always to regard me as his friend and equal. To him I was "Jim," and to me he was "Paul." He used to refer to me as his "friend, the poet"; and sometimes playfully called me his "rival." One day, a few years later, I called upon him in New York, after he had been very sick.

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He had visited Europe and had been the guest of nobles; and such was his literary position at that time that not a few people of other races would have considered it a privilege to shake his hand or to receive a note in his handwriting. White bishops and literary men were his friends; but he had not forgotten me. He had heard that I was visiting near him in the East, and had sent for me.

I was surprised to find him up and fully dressed, waiting to receive me. I was then a minister, and had had several things in the *Century*, and in other magazines. Mrs. Dunbar, the poet's wife, happened to be away, but Dunbar introduced me to his landlady in his happy, gracious way:

"This is my friend, the *poet*," he said, emphasising the word "poet."

"Oh! This is another '*poet*,' is it?" exclaimed the landlady, half-derisively, as if she suspected that Dunbar, though ill, was about to be bored by some amateurish pest.

"No, no!" Dunbar quickly corrected her, "not *that*! He's a real *poet* who writes for magazines, as I do."

Then he gave orders for a quail-on-toast dinner (my first and *only* one) and sent for several of his friends to come to meet me. Then he took me out over the house tops (he lived in a third-story flat) to meet others. It was (to me) unique calling.

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That evening, after he had taken me in a cab to call upon several of our old Chicago friends who were living in New York, Paul insisted upon my spending the night with him, which I did, sleeping in an extra pair of his pajamas, while he sat up for a time by the bed, pretending that I was sick and he was well, and scolding me for breaking the doctor's orders by going out at night with a friend when I was "so ill" (as *he* had done with me, *over my protest*). In the morning I had him good-bye. That was the last time we ever met on earth.

Some six years later, while I was building a church in my boyhood home in Michigan, I learned that Paul was slowly dying of consumption in his old home in Dayton. The thought came that perhaps I might save him. I had once, when a boxing teacher, developed a man who was scarcely able to rise upon his tiptoes into a fairly rugged athlete. This former pupil of mine, who was thought to have consumption, is alive to-day and the father of an interesting family. I wrote to Dunbar to come on and spend the summer with me in my home, and that, without cost, I would try to win him back to life. His reply follows:

"DAYTON, OHIO, Sept. 30th, 1904.

Rev. James D. Corrothers, South Haven, Mich.

MY DEAR JIM:

I have your letter and was exceedingly glad to hear from you after all the years of your silence. I cannot exactly

Dunbar, Douglass and Riley

write you that the report is untrue, and I can only say that we hope it was exaggerated.

I sincerely wish you success in the founding of your church there and hope that you will do well in your old home and keep better health there than I have in mine. If the summer finds me still in the land of the living, I shall take pleasure in visiting you at South Haven. Shall be glad to have a line from you at any time.

Very sincerely your friend,

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR."

I have known but one Paul Dunbar. What other gifted men my race will produce in the future no man knows; but, surely, it will never produce a man of lovelier manners than he. His ways were charming, and his heart was the heart of a child. It was not without tears that I learned of his death, and knew that then he could not come to me. He was one of the few beings over whom I had a tear to shed. The *Century Magazine* in November, 1912, contained some lines which I wrote to the memory of my friend. I trust that it may not be thought improper to quote them here:

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR *

"He came, a dark youth, singing in the dawn
Of a new freedom, glowing o'er his lyre,
Refining, as with great Apollo's fire,
His people's gift of song. And, thereupon,

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This Negro singer, come to Helicon,
Constrained the masters, listening, to admire,
And roused a race to wonder and aspire,
Gazing which way their honest voice was gone,
With ebon face uplit of glory's crest.
Men marveled at the singer, strong and sweet,
Who brought the cabin's mirth, the tuneful night,
But faced the morning, beautiful with light,
To die while shadows yet fell toward the west,
And leave his laurels at his people's feet.

"Dunbar, no poet wears your laurels now;
None rises, singing, from your race like you,
Dark melodist, immortal, though the dew
Fell early on the bays upon your brow,
And tinged with pathos every halcyon vow
And brave endeavour. Silence o'er you threw
Flowerets of love. Or, if an envious few
Of your own people brought no garlands, how
Could Malice smite him whom the gods had crowned?
If, like the meadow-lark, your flight was low,
Your flooded lyrics half the hilltops drowned;
A wide world heard you, and it loved you so
It stilled its heart to list the strains you sang,
And o'er your happy songs its plaudits rang."

**INTERESTING PEOPLE AND UNUSUAL
EXPERIENCES**

CHAPTER VII

INTERESTING PEOPLE AND UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

THE geographical situation of Chicago, its many inducements and advantages, its freer atmosphere, its indefatigable spirit and multitudinous opportunities for labour have invited and developed a multifarious Negro life in that city. From Wisconsin; from Michigan, Iowa and rural Illinois; from Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and Tennessee; from the Mississippi bottoms; from all the Southern states; from even the West Indies; from New York and from Brazil Negroes have poured into the giant city of the lakes. They constitute no inconsiderable portion of its citizenship, and enjoy an environment favourable to the higher development and prosperity of those who are ambitious for personal betterment. Some of the brightest men and women in the race have been developed in Chicago.

Among the young men whom it was my privilege to know there in the years of my earlier manhood was Charles Winter Wood, in the opinion of many the finest tragedian of his race. Though less well known

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than Ira Aldrige, the American Negro who in antebellum times won wide renown as an actor in England, through his Shakesperean rôles, and whose descendants still move among the better classes abroad, Charles Winter Wood is an actor of such unusual natural ability and scholastic training that nothing but the tragedy of his colour has kept him from coming into his own on the American stage. Besides his remarkable natural talents, which amounted to genius of a high order, Winter Wood has been thoroughly schooled. He was graduated from the Chicago grammar and high schools, from the Soper School of Oratory and from Beloit College at Beloit, Wisconsin. He is a tall, athletic mulatto of fine stage presence, and has a voice of remarkable richness and flexibility. The story of his early life is romantic and touching.

Once a little, ragged bootblack in the streets of Chicago, he was born in Tennessee, and was the son of a Methodist minister. His father died while Charles was quite a little fellow, and the family had moved to Chicago, the mother doing washing and other domestic service while the boy went out upon the streets as a bootblack to help maintain their tiny home. From the very earliest, almost, Winter Wood began to attract attention by his clever acting and reciting. With a crowd of his fellow bootblacks and newsboys for an audience, he would repair to the comparative quiet

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of some down-town alley and entertain his enthusiastic young mates with choice bits from his ever-growing repertoire. Shakesperean selections, Poe's "Raven" or "The Bells," a snatch from a popular play or an imitation of a favourite actor were among the widely divergent acquisitions with which he entertained his young friends.

Whenever Winter Wood could save up pennies enough to purchase a ticket, he spent his evenings in the heaven of some theatre. Once, in the old Chicago Opera House, during an exciting moment in "The Black Crook," one of the strong and brilliant plays of two decades ago, the bootblack actor could not contain himself. Springing up from his seat in the peanut gallery, he exclaimed excitedly: "*I can play that! I can play that!*" The amused audience turned good-naturedly to see the excited little fellow whose interest in histrionic things had made him oblivious to all else.

One day while Winter Wood was reciting in an alley for a group of his young bootblack friends, a white lawyer who happened to be passing stopped a moment to witness the unique spectacle—a ragged, little coloured bootblack reciting Shakesperean selections to an appreciative crowd of white bootblacks and newsboys. The lawyer was amused—interested—*amazed!* "That boy has histrionic ability of a high

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order," he mused. "I want B—— to hear him!" he said, and hurried away.

In a few minutes he was back, bringing with him a lawyer friend. The boys were still clustered about Winter Wood, who was giving them an imitation of Sol Smith Russell in "A Poor Relation." "Millions o' people in Asia," he was saying, "an' they've all got sore eyes! I tell you whut there's *millions* in it! There's millions *in* it!"

The lawyers consulted a moment; then called the boy aside.

"What's your name?" they inquired.

"Charles Winter Wood," said the boy.

"How would you like to go to school, Charlie?" they asked.

"Fine!" he cried.

"Well, meet us to-morrow morning at this address," they directed, giving him a card which contained the address of a third lawyer.

Charlie was there on time.

"We want you to recite for this gentleman, Charlie," said his new friends. "He knows about you, and perhaps may become interested."

"What shall I recite?" asked the boy.

"The 'Ghost Scene' from 'Macbeth,' if you know it," suggested the new lawyer, who was something of a wag, and was curious to see how the little mulatto,



One Sabbath morning I was invited to preach in the coloured Baptist church in Yonkers, N. Y., and there I met Rosina B. Harvey who, afterwards, became my wife.



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whose face was begrimed with dirt and blacking, would ever manage to turn pale at the supposed appearance of Banquo's ghost. But, to the astonishment of the three lawyers, the little bootblack *did* turn pale at the appropriate moment, rendering the scene with such naturalness and tragic intensity as quite to astonish his small but very critical audience. Then he gave them a scene from Richard III, and also an imitation of Nat Goodwin in which he almost outdid Goodwin himself in earnest pleasantry. When he was gone, the three lawyers decided to bear the expense of giving him a thorough education, sharing the financial responsibility equally among themselves.

That afternoon they looked him up and entered him, all begrimed—just as he was—as a student in the Soper School of Oratory, from which he was graduated, as from the other schools already mentioned. His generous patrons not only kept their financial promises with him, but, with eager solicitude, advised and watched over him, piloting him carefully through every crisis and difficulty of his early career. Their devotion to their coloured protégé was truly remarkable. He was not allowed to do anything that would interfere with his studies or in any sense embarrass him. He had never to worry about financial matters at any time. Invariably, every three months, he received a substantial check from his benefactors which

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enabled him to live decently, and to enjoy himself sanely. The settlement of his bills and tuition was left entirely to his own discretion and honesty. Remaining at home, he was able to relieve his mother of her drudging toil by assuming her responsibilities. His summer vacations were usually spent at Mackinac Island, the fund furnished by his friends being ample to defray the expense of this outing, as well as to cover his schooling and living expenses. He lived sensibly and without extravagance, was a splendid young man, kindly disposed toward everybody, and not in the least puffed with egotism because of his good fortune. It was a genuine disappointment to all who knew him; and, in the minds of those whose privilege it was to hear this gifted young man, a distinct loss to the American stage that he was not permitted to follow his natural bent as an actor, for which he was so pre-eminently fitted by nature and training. Mr. Wood is now, I believe, an instructor in English at Tuskegee.

Another interesting character whom I knew in Chicago was Chas. Steward, a coloured newspaper man. He was one of the first coloured reporters in America, and, I think, the first coloured shorthand writer in the West, which made him a sort of "eighth wonder" in Chicago twenty-five years ago, when to see a Negro writing shorthand was almost like witnessing a magi-

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cal performance. The grotesque manner and peculiar appearance of Steward heightened the effect of his surprising accomplishment. He was for a time connected with the *Chicago Inter Ocean* and the *Dispatch*; and also wrote weekly articles for coloured papers under the nom de plumes, "J. O. Midnight" and "Rambler."

Short and stocky, clever, witty, and of almost wholly African blood, Steward is *sui generis*. He may truthfully say, with one of Shakespere's characters, "*I am myself alone.*" For some years he has made it a practice to travel through the South, reporting large coloured conventions, associations and farmers' conferences for New York and Boston papers, and for the Associated Press. To the casual observer, there is nothing in Steward's appearance which, at first glance, distinguishes him particularly from the most ordinary Negro. One day in Charlotte, N. C., he was hurrying, satchel in hand, to catch a train, when a sceptical white policeman, noting the contrast between him and the costly bag he carried, stopped him with the suspicious inquiry:

"Hey, Darky, where you goin' with that satchel?"

Steward immediately *understood*: To parley or to tell the plain facts meant arrest. He thought quickly, but spoke drawlingly, and with pretended stupidity:

"I'm j-e-s' t-a-k-i-n' t-h-i-s b-a-g t' t-h' d-e-p-o-t,

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S-i-r, f-e-r Mr. *S-t-e-w-a-r-d*. H-e'll b-e t-h-e-r-e t-i-m-e I g-i-t t-h-e-r-e."

"Well, then, hurry up, you dunce!" admonished the arm of the law, waving him on.

"T-h-a-n-k-ee, Boss!" said Steward. "T-h-a-t's j-e-s' whut I g-u-e-ss I'll d-o."

Steward has written for the *New York Sun*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Boston Post and Transcript* and the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, as well as for nearly all the Chicago papers and the Associated Press.

One of the most peculiar coloured characters whom I ever met was a strange old fellow whom I wrote up while doing newspaper work in Chicago. The old man's name was Drake. A venerable, silver-haired "Uncle Tom" in appearance, the old fellow peddled dust-pans and pamphlets about the streets by day, and did gratuitous temperance work at night. He had travelled over all the Middle Western states and several Eastern states, as well as throughout the South, in his temperance crusade, without even a thought of financial gain, making temperance converts wherever he went. More than eight thousand people, white and coloured, had been induced to sign the pledge through his influence.

Drake was won over to the Temperance cause through the contention of a white Temperance orator

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that if five drinks of liquor would make a man drunk, one drink would make him one-fifth drunk. To Drake, this logic was stunning. He went out to think the matter over. Drake had himself been in the habit of taking a dram every morning for twenty years. He had had one, in fact, that very morning. Therefore, he reasoned, he was one-fifth drunk, and had been so for twenty years. The admission startled him. He took the pledge, and started out at once to convert the whole world, if possible. His first convert was a little, eight-year-old white boy who, frightened by the earnestness of Drake, took the pledge immediately—and *kept* it. Drake spoke to chain gangs, in penitentiaries, alms houses, at camp-meetings, in churches, hospitals, courthouses, and upon the streets.

His method for obtaining converts was peculiar. After talking to an audience for an hour, Drake would suddenly ask everybody in the house who believed it was wrong to get drunk to stand up. And, of course, everybody stood. Drake would tell jokes for about ten minutes, then bid all who wished thereafter to refrain from drinking intoxicating liquor, "as a beverage," to sit down. And the tired audience would "sit down"—*caught!* Then the happy, eccentric Drake would pin blue ribbons upon them, laughing like a boy.

At the time when I wrote about the old gentleman,

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he was in very poor circumstances. My article was of service in bringing his needs to the attention of several charitably disposed white people. Several small sums and some groceries were sent to him. Even saloon-keepers volunteered to help. It was mid-winter, and times were hard. A committee of white lady church-workers who called upon him at his scanty lodgings, after offering prayers, inquired, through their chairman, what he needed most—"some leaflets or a new Bible."

"Madam," observed Drake, shivering over the flickering remnants of a fire, "I needs a hot *stove!* A *hot stove!* A rale *hot Stove!*"

They took the hint and sent him some coal.

Drake was then more than seventy-five years old, and had spent nearly forty years of his life in the Temperance cause.

Perhaps the strangest character whom I met during my newspaper career was Prince Bonge, a native African whom I ran upon, as if by chance, one evening when he was about to be put out of his room for non-payment of rent. I wrote him up in the *Daily News*, telling of his country where diamonds were playthings, and where gold nuggets could be picked up off the ground after a rain; of how the only white man who had ever visited his tribal lands was a young

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German missionary who won the king's favour and converted the young prince to Christianity; of how, with the king's consent, the missionary and the prince had started for America, laden with diamonds and gold, to educate the young prince, when the missionary, dying on shipboard, was buried at sea; of how the prince, robbed of all his treasure, found himself penniless and alone in a strange, new world, and had finally settled down as a bootblack in Chicago. But he was unable to accommodate himself to American ways, and his condition had become truly pitiful.

The "story" which I wrote about the prince became "the call" the evening it was printed in the *Daily News*. The newsboys ran about the streets calling: "All about the royal prince in Chicago!" The next morning Bonge received more than twenty letters from white people who wished to return to his country with him, and engage in developing its resources. The prince soon organised a company for that purpose, returning to Africa by way of England. All of the company except Bonge were white.

In England they had some difficulty with the authorities because they had "landed arms" (the few guns they carried) on English soil. It became necessary for one of the party to go to jail as the representative of the company, or the entire party would have had to suffer incarceration for their technical

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violation of the English law. Bonge promptly detailed one of his trusted white followers for the unpleasant experience. Once in Africa, he abandoned the entire party, and left them to straggle back to America as best they could.

"That is better than their ancestors treated *my* race in America!" declared the prince, in justification of his course.

Months afterward, a large-framed white man who had been one of the Bonge party came to my house in Chicago, and wept as he recounted his experience to me. He had put \$500 into the expedition. This represented the savings of his lifetime. It was his all. He was nearing old age now—passed sixty-five. He was no longer in ruddy health. His son had died; and his faithful wife, his sole remaining earthly friend, who had gone all the way to Africa with him, was ill. He sat before me, bowed and crushed with grief. How gladly would I have made good his financial loss, had I only been able to do it! I felt very sorry for him, though I was in no sense responsible for the adventure he had hazarded, nor for the direful results. His motives in going had been purely speculative, and in Bonge he had met a votive force which had spelled disaster for him. There had been no altruism in his attachment for Bonge. But it had never occurred to him, nor to any of the party, that

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the half-savage prince had cunningly divined this, even from the beginning. From the viewpoint of the prince, it had been a game of wits.

When I first decided to become a minister, I was urged by an energetic coloured bishop to whom I was introduced on the street to identify myself with his denomination. Up to that moment, I had had no thought of joining his sect; but, after much persuasion, I decided to meet his conference in St. Louis and, possibly, to join. In the meantime, at the bishop's request, I was made a "local preacher."

When I reached St. Louis, I was unanimously elected as the "official reporter for the conference." As such, I was expected to get reports of the doings of the conference into the St. Louis daily papers, and also to prepare a copy for the Associated Press. This meant that, to "cover" the field, and to keep the white reporters away, I must prepare as many reports as there were daily papers in the city which cared for that kind of news—plus one more copy for the Associated Press. I understood, too, that the only payment I could expect to receive from the conference for my work would be a small nominal sum which would be voted merely in "compliment" for my week's service. I had paid my fare over; but had not money enough, by a good deal, to pay my way back to Chi-

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cago. In fact, I scarcely had a week's street car fare left. So I must look to the white editors—to whom I was a total stranger—for pay, and for my fare back home.

I took my first report to the *Globe-Democrat*, and it was readily accepted.

"Will you pay me for it at space rates?" I asked the City Editor, a Southern man.

"No," he replied. "I have paid reporters sitting around here who can do the work. But, if you want to do it, and can do it in proper shape, we'll print what we want of it, as it will save us the bother of sending a man to cover it. But we can't *pay* you anything."

"Well, all right," I said, "I'll do the work."

I felt confident that no great newspaper, like the *Globe-Democrat* would use my work for *nothing*, if I did it well. I accordingly furnished brief daily reports for two evening papers and another for the Associated Press, and did my best to write out full and explicit reports of the proceedings of the conference for the *Globe-Democrat*, spicing them with occasional humorous occurrences which I had observed the paper apparently enjoyed giving to its readers. I studied carefully the paper's style, and endeavoured to conform exactly to it. I noticed that the editor was printing my "stuff" without a break, as I wrote it,

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from a half column to one and a quarter columns, without a change in the wording or punctuation.

The third evening when I came in the editor said to me:

"Say, Boy, where were you educated?"

I told him.

"Where have you been doing newspaper work?"

I informed him.

"Well, you do very fair work; *very* fair work," he puzzlingly commented.

Every evening after that he had a smile of encouragement and usually a compliment for me when he reached after my copy. "All right, Boy. Good! Nice weather."

On the eighth day morning the conference closed, giving me "a complimentary vote" and two dollars for almost writing my head off and running my feet off for them. I was quite crestfallen in my disappointment at this exhibition of their grudging spirit and stinginess. For it was so much *less* of a "compliment," even, than I had *expected*, especially since they had freely and proudly stated that the conference had never before succeeded in getting such lengthy and favourable reports in the St. Louis papers; and they had collected more than \$1,500.00 during their eight days' session. I suspected, too, that certain men would get a pretty big "whack" out of the \$1,500.00. But

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I accepted what they gave me without comment. Then I went to turn in my final copy to the *Globe-Democrat*, and to bid the editor good-bye, not knowing how I was ever to get back to Chicago if he failed or forgot to give me anything for my work.

"There's a check waiting downstairs for you," said the City Editor, with a note of regret in his voice. "And, say, Boy!" he added quickly, "how'd you like a regular place on this paper? We can make room for a decent coloured chap here. We have thousands of coloured readers, and we need a good, trained man to cover their news events. How'd you like to live in St. Louis?"

"I don't like the drinking water," I replied promptly.

This was, with me, no fanciful complaint. For St. Louis city water, in those days, looked as if it had been taken from the famously muddy Missouri river. In a single glass of it there was as much yellow mud as if a handful of mustard had been thrown into it. Housewives could not use it for washing purposes until it had been allowed to settle over night. I felt that it must be unhealthy, and declined to become a citizen of the great river city, not stopping to consider that, if others lived there, *I* could.

Nevertheless, I began to realise soon afterward that I had made a big mistake and lost a fine opportunity.

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Never before nor since has such another opportunity come to me, anywhere. And *never*, in any *Northern* city, nor by any Northern person, was such a door opened to me, or such an offer made. No Northern newspaper has ever allowed me even to *hope* for such a place. Even now, after years of magazine writing and newspaper work, I may not aspire to even the smallest regular position on a daily newspaper. Personal habits; aptitude; experience; congeniality do not count. Not even the needs of the paper count in the matter. *Nothing counts but colour!*

I was not given an appointment by the Methodist conference, but was ordered to transfer to their New York Conference, where I would be given a church. This would take me nearly a thousand miles from home, and place me among strangers, at the mercy of the bishop and conference. I was expected to make the trip, of course, entirely at my own expense, and risk getting something worth while, giving up my newspaper work and whatever prospects I had, and becoming plastic dough in their hands. But I had seen so much of the inner workings of things that I was heartily sick of it all. I had seen ministers who were suspected of intimacy with a brother minister's wife sit upon the wronged husband's case, and expel him because he would not consent to live with the woman;

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I had seen them draw up resolutions of sympathy and protest in behalf of a Negro preacher who was in the penitentiary for manslaughter; I had seen them expel a poor minister who had built them a fine church, for the alleged reason that he "had afterward burned the church down," though there was no legal proof against the man who vehemently protested his innocence of the charge. After he was expelled, I was requested to "publish his degradation broadcast in all the daily papers." I flatly refused to add to the poor man's burden of sorrow, not knowing anything personally about the case. I could not see wherein these ministers were much superior to the Negro boat hands among whom I had once worked, and I did not particularly relish the thought of close association with them. To be sure there were good ministers among them—men of sterling qualities—but these were in the minority, and were paid little attention to. The majority of the ministers were sadly lacking in education, quite often far more so than some of the gambling Negro ruffians whom I had known on the boat. When I added their mental unpreparedness to their unlovely personal traits, I could not see in them enough of those better qualifications which fit men for a holy calling or for leadership.

"What shall we do, Fannie?" I asked my wife, when I had explained the whole matter to her, after

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I got home. "I'd almost rather die than be mixed up with such as that," I said.

Winter was coming on, and I had no regular salary, and no immediate prospects; nothing whatever but my irregular newspaper work. We fully realised the cold, dismal future we must face together if we stuck it out. But, laying her hand gently in mine, she said calmly and bravely:

"Let us not go into it, then, James."

IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND IN
THE MAGAZINES—*BLACK NIGHT*.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND IN THE MAGAZINES—*Black Night*

THE “divinity that shapes our ends” leads our reluctant feet oftentimes in paths we have forsworn. Implacable in its deep desire; inscrutable and omniscient-souled, the Almighty THOUGHT moves calmly toward the desired end: bending our wills to meet the General Plan, and moulding *our* thought, IT wills our way. Our *thoughts*!—what are *they*? Surely not creatures of the brain, but living forces which *use* the brain, their *instrument*. They are, at times, apparently radio-eccentric—influenced by locality, environment and circumstance: nevertheless, they are viewless publicists, working consciously toward an appointed end. You were in New York, let us say, and you *thought* New York; you were in the country, and your mind was filled with thoughts of rural beauty; in the desert or in the Australian bush, and there came over you a sense of loneliness; in the forest depths you enjoyed a sense of restful quietude; on a

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hill or mount at sunrise your soul was bathed in radiant beauty; you beheld the ocean, and it graciously gave unto your soul of its majestic vastness, sublimity and awe. The little brook, toiling at the mill-wheel; the humble peasant, labouring obscurely in his field, have sent into your thought object lessons of contentment and usefulness. They were God's teachers for you; helpers along the way. They bent your steps—*whitherward?* I know not; but *you* know, by searching, that they influenced your life. Had you not dwelt in a certain spot, you would not have had certain thoughts, or one *particular* thought; and, consequently, would not have written certain fine words, or done certain gracious deeds. Up this road there were friends for you; Friends, Teachers, Sorrows, Sunbursts—Thoughts. *It was God's way.* Sorrows are teachers and black valleys are friends. Experiences herald vistas of thought. One thought is related to another thought which becomes the ancestor of a succession of thoughts which produce, even though bequeathed to us through the medium of the blood of far ancestors, the mighty ACT or merciful deed. *God always intended the deed.* He has schooled us for it. How, with the dew of a new beauty, come the weeping prophet's words: "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps!*"

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For three years after my experience in St. Louis, I continued at newspaper work in Chicago, always as a "space writer," making sometimes a considerable weekly sum, and at other times being barely able to meet our expenses. At times, I had even to resort to "dinner waiting" again. It was rather a precarious existence. I remember hiring myself once, for a period of two weeks, to a furniture mover. I should have abandoned newspaper work altogether, but it fascinated me, and I kept hoping for better things.

During the first McKinley-Bryan campaign, the nation-wide interest in political matters was intense. Newspapers gave almost unlimited space to the subject then predominant in the public mind. Comparatively important local matters were sometimes excluded, or but meagerly reported. The papers brimmed and bristled with political news. Politics was everywhere. The air sizzled with it. The populace seethed with anxiety over it. Editors appeared to want nothing but political news facts; and these were received through their regularly established channels for news gathering, such as the Associated Press despatches and city news bureaus, or were covered by regular reporters. "Space writers" were effectually shut out; and in my case, particularly so. I resolved, therefore, to quit Chicago; and to retire permanently from news-

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paper work, foregoing all thought of any further effort at public life.

Accordingly, with my wife and two little sons, I moved to Benton Harbor, Michigan, a thriving resort and lake port, southward in the Michigan "Fruit Belt" twenty-five miles from my old home, South Haven. After we arrived there, I had no employment and but little money. But I had abundant health and two good hands. We rented a neat cottage, and I thankfully took the first work I could secure, that of helping to unload cargoes of salt and flour from the large, steam freight-barges docking at that port. The pay was from twenty to twenty-five cents an hour for extra men. Besides the regular boat crew, a gang of twenty or thirty extra men, both coloured and white men, would be employed in unloading a boat, labouring without rest until the job was finished. I frequently laboured in this way, without food, rest or sleep, for forty-eight and fifty-two hours at a stretch. I had never done such work before, and it went a little hard on me. Sometimes, after handling the heavy, dripping barrels of wet salt a little while, my hands would crack open and drip blood. But I stuck it out.

In moving to Benton Harbor, my intention had been for a while to help in loading fruit on the several daily steamers plying between Chicago and that port. This was lighter and more plentiful work than the

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heavy dock work in which I engaged; but I found, to my great surprise, that coloured men were debarred from doing this work, white labourers reserving to themselves all the lighter employment there about the docks. In the town where I had been reared, twenty-five miles north, there was no race barrier in matters of common labour. The white labourers in Benton Harbor were thrice favoured by their arrogant rule: They had the lighter, pleasanter and more plentiful work. Only two or three salt and flour barges arrived at that port in a week, while a number of regular steamers took on fruit there daily. Lumber vessels sailing into that port were generally unloaded by Negroes. But white men were not hindered from working wherever they chose, except by their own inclinations. The fruit boats were completely in their hands, and they shared in the unloading of other cargoes whenever their needs demanded it.

After doing this sort of labour for some weeks, I secured a place on a fruit farm, picking fruit by the quart. As I increased my efficiency as a fruit-picker, I was given a settled wage of one dollar a day, together with fruit and vegetables for our family, and the promise of a cottage, free of rent, before the winter. I was reconciled to the thought that I could, by so labouring, rear my two boys with brighter prospects for success in life than had been vouchsafed

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to me. For myself all thoughts of a career had been banished. I had accepted what I considered the inevitable, and was happy in the bosom of my little family.

But I was not destined to remain long in my retirement.

While I was at work on the fruit farm, a tri-weekly coloured newspaper began to come to me from Chicago. It did not always come regularly, but, from time to time, it kept coming, a very welcome visitor indeed. I sent it a few Michigan news items, gratuitously. They were at once printed, and I received a prompt request, almost in the tone of a complaint, for "some editorials." "You are the editor," they declared.

They had been carrying my name on their editorial page from the first, in bold letters which announced me as the editor; but I had considered it merely a freakish sort of compliment, knowing the publisher as I did. Now I saw he was apparently in earnest.

The publisher was "Tom" Crump, a coloured inventor, a peculiar genius with whom I had often talked about the possibilities of a coloured daily newspaper. He had agreed to start a newspaper which should develop into one, as soon as he saw his way clear to do so. And *this* was his start, the *Chicago Bee*, a tri-weekly. He now wrote me to come on, offering me

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a one-fourth interest in the paper, if I would return to Chicago, and edit the paper in reality.

I promptly decided not to go, fearing that "the bottom might drop out of the paper" before long, and I should be stranded in the city, and worse off than when we were there before.

But my fellow employés on the farm, the foreman, my wife and the pastor of the little coloured church which we attended all urged me to accept the offer. I therefore decided to go, closing up my affairs in Benton Harbor, and crossing the lake on one of the daily fruit and passenger steamers plying between there and Chicago. It was decided that my family should remain behind in Michigan until I could prepare for them.

I shall never forget that awful night upon the lake, in one of the worst storms in the history of Lake Michigan's navigation. Men prayed and frightened women and children shrieked all around me. Two other steamers went down that night, and a number of sailing vessels were wrecked. The captain practically gave our steamer up as lost. A number of horses had their legs broken by the plunging of the boat, and had to be shot. A well-to-do passenger offered the captain \$1000 to put back into port. "Impossible!" cried the captain. "Our only hope lies in keeping straight ahead. If we attempt to go about,

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we'll roll over in the troughs of the sea." One could not walk straight, stand still, sit still nor *lie* still, for the rolling and plunging of the boat. One rolled over and over, if one lay down. Great hogsheads of water poured in through the cabin skylights. The man at the wheel had to be lashed at his post. No one knew if we should ever see the land again. Many gave themselves up for lost.

Somehow, I could not take it in that way. I decided to sleep, knowing that if we ever made the shore, I must needs be rested for to-morrow's work; or that, if we were wrecked, I should be the stronger, through sleep, to endeavour to save my life. Or if we went down without warning, I reasoned that it would be better to die asleep. After thinking the matter over in this way, I fell asleep almost immediately, rolling over and over with the careening and plunging of the ship. In the morning the welcome lights of Chicago gleamed before us; and the lake was growing calm. But, great was my dismay when, upon arriving at the erstwhile publication office of the *Bee*, I discovered that the paper had been set out of doors the day before for non-payment of rent. A friendly saloon-keeper across the way had given the *Bee* free temporary quarters in a back room. I decided to return to Michigan, but, upon apprising my wife of the situation, I was informed that my job on the fruit farm had been

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given to some one else. There was nothing to do but to stick. So, I remained, writing nearly every line that went into the *Bee*, besides soliciting "ads.," and doing occasional "space work" for the daily papers. But, other than my board and lodging, I never received anything for all my labour on the *Bee*. Not a cent was given to me. My one-fourth proprietorship was a grinning farce. I had to look entirely to the white papers for cash. I decided to quit the *Bee*. I soon had my family back in Chicago, however, and was doing "space work" once more—not particularly better off than we had been before. I was driven to the extremity of "dinner waiting" again. I began to wonder for what purpose I had been placed upon the earth. I burned to help others; was burdened with a desire for unselfish service. I groaned and agonized in spirit. My life seemed frittering away to no end.

One day, as I returned from my labour at waiting, I passed the great church where I had given the reception to Frederick Douglass; and, looking upon it with inexpressible disgust, I could not restrain the feeling that the Negro church, as attuned and conducted, had enthralled my race to *ancient* things instead of encouraging it to absorb the progressive and beneficial ideas of the present era. I raged aloud as I thought of the "big" Negroes who hypocritically fattened themselves upon their own ignorant people, whom they mis-

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\ led. Then the thought came: "Not *all* Negro leaders are bad. Some are actually the heroes of race enlightenment. The church is a great institution professedly organised *to do good*. It has the people; and is sweeping serenely on, while I rage and beat out my strength in my impotency, unnoticed and unknown. Why not ally myself with the church, and be the ideal minister that I want others to be?" I saw, too, that I was not responsible for what other ministers might do, but only for what I did personally. It seemed then that I had been foolish to remain out of the ministry as I had, when the cause of righteousness needed honest men.

A sunburst fell upon my being. My soul seemed relieved. I was aglow with a new delight. My soul was satisfied. I could now conscientiously enter the ministry of Christ. Our friends whom I informed of my determination seemed especially pleased. "This is what we always thought you *ought* to be!" they declared. My wife, the daughter of a minister, was delighted. A long journey lay before us (I had again been bidden to come East), but we looked hopefully into the future. Our greatest concern was the money for our trip; but we set about planning for this. Frequently I worked all day as a lunch counter waiter, and scrubbed offices or "did space" for the papers at night, while occasionally she did canvassing and do-



I sent to *The Century* a Negro dialect poem entitled: *Way in De Woods an' Nobody Dah*. I soon had the gratification of seeing my verses in type.



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mestic "day's work," when suddenly, in the midst of our preparations, she developed consumption. Physicians recommended a milder climate for her. I knew that I should soon look upon her face no more.

We went without delay to Baltimore, where my wife's parents lived, and near which, at Catonsville, her father was completing a pretty church. Leaving my family there, I met my first conference at Rochester, N. Y., and was assigned to a pastorate at Bath, N. Y. Within ten days I received a telegram stating that my wife was dead. A month later, Richard, our younger son, followed her. They sleep together in Baltimore. Willard, our first born, is with me to-day, a young man of twenty-two, nearly; and taller than I.

Bath is a quiet village, pleasantly situated in the Conhocton valley, in Steuben county, N. Y., eight miles from Hammondsport and Keuka Lake. It is an aristocratic, little place; the county seat, I think; and has many wealthy citizens, retired people, some of whom have been members of the New York Stock Exchange. It was singularly free from race prejudice. The best people in Bath invited me to their homes and frequently attended my church. Much of the support of the coloured pastor in Bath came from the generous-hearted whites. I had a pretty church, but a small

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congregation. They could agree to pay me only a mere pittance—\$300.00 a year, without parsonage. Nearly half of this amount is still owed to me to-day.

Because of the poverty of my parish, and the almost invisibility of my salary, I had to cast about for some other means of subsistence to remain upon the field. As there were no daily papers there, I decided to try the magazines. I had already contributed several pieces of humorous, dialect verse gratuitously to the *Steuben Courier*, the Bath paper; and some of these pieces had been copied by other papers. I decided to try a high-class magazine. So I sent to the *Century* a Negro dialect poem of twenty-four lines, entitled: " 'Way in de Woods, an' Nobody Dah." I received almost immediately a complimentary letter from the late Richard Watson Gilder, then editor of the *Century*, informing me that they thought of accepting my work. Could I furnish "the usual references of a new contributor"? This I did, and soon had the gratification of seeing my verses in the *Century Magazine*.

Until my check came for the poem, I speculated much as to the probable amount it would represent. In my greenness, and because of the exaggerated stories I had heard about "the big pay of magazine writers," I fancied I might be sent anywhere from \$50.00 to \$200.00; *surely* not less than \$25.00. But I came down to earth with what Bill Nye would call

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"a dull, resounding thud," when finally I beheld a check for exactly \$5.00. However, *it was \$5.00!* I tried the *Century* again with a poem called "De Tree-Toad," and was given \$7.00 for it. Then the American Press Association sent out a column article about me, and accepted a poem—"Chris'mas on de Ole Plantation"—for which I received twenty-five cents a line—\$16.00. The poem was illustrated by their artists, and it appeared in many of the papers using the American Press Association's service, throughout the country.

I remember with what delight, when my money came, I bought a warm overcoat for my little son, in Baltimore; and put pennies for him in all the pockets, and sent it to him in a box, with presents for all my late wife's family. I did not dream that the good white people of Bath were observing, with any particular degree of interest, my tentatively successful foray into the field of literature; still less that they regarded me as reflecting honour upon the town. But I was informed that this was indeed the case, when a committee of white business men presented me with a new Prince Albert suit; and the white ministers of Bath invited me, through the public press, to give a reading from my own writings in the white M. E. church, under their auspices. This was my first "author's reading," and a most successful one in a financial way,

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nearly \$40.00 being cleared for me. The white ministers of Bath superintended the printing, peddled the bills, sold the tickets and acted as ushers on the night of my reading. The white Episcopalian rector, a Mr. Sanderson, acted as Master of Ceremonies. The affair was entirely a surprise to me. I recall this unique honour with particular gratitude.

After a year spent in Bath, I was appointed private secretary to the bishop. But I did not want the position, and protested earnestly against leaving the active ministry. However, there was no alternative for me but to accept the proffered place, or to be left without anything. A peculiar sort of jealousy had been aroused against me among the coloured ministers, and excuses were found for declaring that I would not succeed as a minister, though I *might* as a writer. The slightest administrative misjudgment, however unintentional, was exploited as a fault. And I was declared impossible.

As the bishop's secretary, I was given no recompense, beyond lodging and board. But I continued to be unusually fortunate with my magazine work. The *Century* accepted two or three more of my offerings, paying me from twelve to fifteen dollars for each. Other leading publications, such as *Truth*, *Types*, the *Criterion*, the *Southern Workman*, the *New York Mail and Express*, the *New York Sunday*

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Herald and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* accepted work from me; and the *Mail and Express* printed a half page sketch about me, illustrated with my photograph. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* paid me \$15.00 for a dialect poem which I wrote "to order" in an hour. It was entitled "De Gallant G. A. R.," and was illustrated. It appeared on Sunday, September 3, 1899, and, together with the illustrations, covered an entire page. This brought me two additional personal "write-ups," one in a Philadelphia paper and the other in the *New York Journal*, the latter covering a half page. A year or two later the *New York Herald* printed two poems of mine in its Sunday edition which were illustrated by R. F. Outcault, the creator of "Buster Brown." One of these poems, with the illustrations, covered an entire page. My duties as secretary were not onerous. I was given access to the bishop's library, and was allowed to do my writing, at which I often worked until far into the night. I continually pleaded, however, to be given a pastorate.

After a few months, unexpected difficulties arose in the church at Red Bank, N. J., resulting in a vacancy there. The coloured people there had refused to receive the minister who had been sent to them, and had locked the church doors. I begged to be given the place; and finally, after much persuasion, I was appointed to the church. I was kindly received, and

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was given a consideration of \$500.00 a year and parsonage.

This splendid old church, "The Mother of the New Jersey Conference," took me kindly in hand, and trained me thoroughly in ritualistic matters; in church management, church financiering, and in many things ministerial. It was the best organised and most dignified church I have ever pastored. Many of its members were well-to-do, and lived in beautiful homes; and many of its young people were well read, intelligent and ambitious. Among the most delightful ministerial recollections I have are my recollections of these inspiring young people, with some of whom I am still in touch.

The Red Bank church was conservative, but prompt, business-like and punctiliously honest in all its financial affairs. Its credit was A-1 with white business men. Its several official boards and auxiliaries were composed of men and women of character and good judgment whom I soon learned to trust implicitly and to admire. Whatever of good I have since accomplished, or may accomplish, in the ministry, I owe largely to the development received through the patient, loving kindness of this splendid old church. In this, I shall always be its debtor. While pastoring this church, I organised a night school and literary society out of which were developed an artist (now

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dead), an editor, L. O. Summersett, and a trained nurse, the late Mrs. E. Madlyn Brewer of New York. I continued my literary work in *Truth*, the *Criterion*, *Southern Workman* and the *Century*. I remember receiving an invitation to call upon an editor, E. Sylvester, of *Truth*, who wrote a remarkably heavy, masculine hand. I called and, to my astonishment, discovered that the possessor of the lusty chirography *was a woman*—Miss Elizabeth Sylvester, a sister of Major Sylvester, Washington's famous Chief of Police. I recall how heartily she laughed at my embarrassing bewilderment.

While pastoring in Red Bank, I was one among two or three hundred guests at a banquet which was given in a New York hotel in honour of the late Elbert Hubbard, the famous Roycrofters and editor of the *Philistine*. There I met Gus Dirks, the artist who draws the "Katzenjammer Kids"; Bliss Carman, the Canadian poet; Post Wheeler, the author and diplomat; Edwin Markham, the author of "The Man with the Hoe," and J. K. Bryans, the silhouette artist who afterwards illustrated my book, "The Black Cat Club." I remember shaking hands with gracious "Fra Elbertus" (Mr. Hubbard), whose long, flowing bow tie, I mentally noted, would have made a good sash for his wife. Mr. Hubbard made a brief speech that bristled with humour and good, hard sense. He assured

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us that he was "a graduate of *The University of Hard Knocks*," and had taken "several post-graduate courses."

I happened to be the only coloured guest; and I recall how interestedly a lady who sat near me at the table—the late Mrs. Zoe Anderson Norris, the friend of "Ragged-Edgers," who afterwards married Mr. Bryans—speculated as to my identity.

"I know that coloured man!" she exclaimed. "It's Booker T. Washington!"

But she learned her mistake.

"Oh, I know *now* whom he is! It's Paul Laurence Dunbar!" she declared.

Then somebody told her my name and calling.

"Oh, I know whom he is *now*!" she explained. "He's only a darky minister from Red Bank!"

Yet, in spite of this, and notwithstanding her Southern birth and rearing, she and Mr. Bryans became my warm personal friends. It was with genuine sorrow that I recently learned of her death. I recall writing my friend Dunbar about my having been mistaken for him; and he wrote back:

"I'm glad to know you were mistaken for me. I bow to the compliment. But how anybody with two perfectly good eyes could ever mistake *you* for *me* passes my ken."

After pastoring for nearly two years in Red Bank, my little son and I prepared to visit England. A num-

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ber of coloured Americans—Douglass, Dunbar and others—had gained friends and opportunities abroad, and I reasoned that it might not be without some beneficial results for me. The managing editor of the *New York World* promised me letters of introduction to the British newspaper fraternity; and Miss Sylvester kindly volunteered to give me letters to a number of her personal friends in England. I had completed all arrangements for going abroad, except purchasing the tickets, when my bishop prevailed upon me to go to Hackensack, N. J., and try to save the little church there. After much prayer and thought upon the matter, and after many urgings and assurances on the part of my bishop, I put aside my own wishes, and decided to go to the church.

Hackensack is a fine little city in Northern Jersey, about fifteen miles from New York City. It is named after an Indian tribe. It is now the home, I believe, of Joseph C. Lincoln, the author of "Cap'n Eri," and is also the home of Sewell Ford, the writer. In those days it was the "jumping-off place" for coloured Methodist ministers. For years none had been able to succeed there. A number had given up, and had quit the denomination and the ministry after having been appointed there. The church and parsonage were dilapidated; and the congregation, numbering less than thirty, was almost at its last extremity, after having

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staggered for years under the burden of a \$1200.00 debt, upon which it was paying compound interest. In addition to this principal debt, there were a number of troublesome, though smaller, "floating debts." The pastor who had preceded me in that field died as I stood by his bedside, soon after I took up the work. The church's credit was not good for a pound of nails. Its roof leaked; its windows were out; and the parsonage was almost an uninhabitable ruin. Boards, barrel-staves and the bottoms of old, tin boilers had been used to patch the roof. During a rain storm, the water ran in rivulets down the inside of its walls, and stood in puddles about the floor.

During the year which I spent as pastor in Hackensack, the parsonage was thoroughly overhauled and repaired; all outstanding "floating debts" were cancelled; and the interest on the main debt was paid up, and the time extended. The church was repaired and beautified; gas lights were installed, and the church's credit redeemed. And the congregation had so increased that a gallery had to be built for its accommodation. The people seemed to have imbibed a new life. Every improvement was promptly paid for. I exchanged pulpits, at times, with the white ministers of the town; and the local daily paper did me the honour to mention my work several times on its editorial page. At this time I kept house with my little

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son, Willard, in the parsonage. I was contributing frequently to the magazines; and it was during this busy period that my book, "The Black Cat Club," was published by a New York firm.

To make possible the work which was accomplished for the parish in Hackensack, I did not press the struggling church for my salary. They had promised me \$350.00 a year. Only a little more than half of this amount was ever received. I was obliged to fall back upon the money which I had saved up toward my trip abroad, together with my small earnings as a magazine writer. I contributed as much cash as any one member toward the improvements and upkeep of the church, and had to dress and live in a manner in keeping with the dignity of my calling. It was not long before my bank account stood pretty close to zero. But the church had received a permanent impetus for good; and I felt satisfied in the thought of reasonable certainty that something worth while awaited me, after resurrecting such a corpse as the Hackensack church had been. Other and better parishes were calling for me. But it was at that time that the black tragedy of my life fell upon me; and I staggered and groaned, like a bludgeoned traveller in the dark. I was bewildered, dazed, and well-nigh helpless. I was a stranger and far from home, and nearly penniless. I had sacrificed *all* to do good,

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when, suddenly, I was accused of plotting to ruin my bishop's good name—a *thing of which I was as innocent as Heaven itself!* I had far other and more profitable things to think about. I should have had nothing to gain, but *everything* to *lose* by such a course. Besides, I had no such wicked thing in my heart. I had never *dreamed* of hurting *any* man in that way. I had helped many men up, but had never torn one down. The whole record of my life cried out against such an accusation. But I had not lived long in the East, and ~~the~~ the trend of my life was not known.

Legal proceedings were taken against me by my bishop, and the matter was speedily brought into court. I had now no money with which to fight for my name or liberty; but I told the simple *truth*, and was quickly acquitted in open court. But ecclesiastical prosecution followed; a prosecution which meant that the machinery and influence of a great Negro church organisation, numbering hundreds of thousands of communicants, was to be set in motion against one man. It meant for me that the most merciless and undeserved ill fortune of my life was at hand; it meant that there would be marshaled against me an overwhelming cavalcade to teach me sorrow and suffering; and that no man of my race who was in any sense connected with, or influenced by, a great church, might safely give me bread or sympathy, lest he incur the

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displeasure of "bigger" Negro men, and perhaps lose a part of his own bread. It meant that all doors of hope would be closed to *me*.

Can you, O Friend unseen, Friend of the untrammelled way who know not the withering hell through which I have come, can you imagine the black meaning of my situation? Ah, *how* can you understand?—you who could demand justice! You do not know the perfidy, the black tragedies which sometimes befall worthy men in the Negro race—butchered because they "know too much," or will not be browbeaten, discredited and done to death, as it were, *by their own*, with impunity, while the dark mass about them looks on in frightened, stupefied silence. And the white man, hearing only *one side* of the matter, yawns! He has been deceived into believing that *righteousness* has been done!

Few Negroes in America are beyond the influence of the church. No other Negro institution is one-half so influential; so powerful. All Negro life in America centres about the church. Coloured professional and business men, as a class, find it wise and profitable to remain in the good graces of the church. Even successful race leaders, like Dunbar, Douglass and Booker T. Washington have not disdained a hearing through the Negro church. To a Negro minister the church means his bread; and the loss of his caste

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means perpetual disgrace. To be excommunicated from his church is, to him, like being given a sentence of slow death—of ignominiously crushing and bitter slow death. He becomes a living dead man among his people—a thing leprous, accursed and unforgivable! All this I was now to be—I who had worked for the glory of the church; and sacrificed! I was to be made a thing to be shunned!—a social and ecclesiastical outlaw!

The shadows moved on. All life seemed blackened. I was almost crazed with grief. My hair was turning white. The shadows overwhelmed me. I seemed suddenly to be moving in a topsy-turvy world where all things went awry. I knew I was hurt; but did not realise how much. Like a dazed man, I groped among pitchy rocks and shadows, and shuddered beside murmurous rivers of pitch, mocked darkly, as by some sudden, guffawing bacchanalia from hell. No strength of my own arm could save me *now*! I thought of the Victim-Conqueror of Calvary whose gospel I had preached, whom I had so imperfectly served. And I cried for help unto Him who had said: "Ye believe in God; believe also in Me. Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid. I will not leave you comfortless. . . . When thou goest through the deep waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when

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thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. . . *My presence shall go with thee, and I shall give thee rest.*"

The shadows grew black. I was soon without a parish, without money or a home; and every pleasant prospect was blasted. Even my literary work paled. I had to begin life all over again. Many unkind things were done to me, and many false and hurtful stories printed or told. Having no money, it was well nigh impossible for me to get these matters corrected. Colored newspapers, as a rule, are in the business *for money*; and, in the absence of personal motives, will print nothing either good or bad about one, unless the editor's palm is crossed. My inability to do this compelled me to suffer under much misrepresentation which hindered me at every turn.

But, I was resolved upon these things:

1. *I would not slander the bishop.* I felt that, perhaps, to some extent, he had been misled by designing, jealous men.

2. *I would not strike back.* That would be a waste of the energy needed to fight my own way up again.

3. *I could still do good.* The riches, the unspeakable pleasure of doing kind deeds would be vouchsafed to me still, I knew, as long as *being* was granted unto me.

4. *I should not degenerate into bad habits.* How-

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ever dark the present or sad the future, there was no help nor solace, I knew, in evil ways.

5. *I should keep trying.* "No man," I thought, "is 'dead' until he is dead. *I will try.*"

I had health and liberty left; no more. But these were enough. I took my little, motherless boy by the hand, one sunset, and passed out into the night, away from the scene of our sorrow and sacrifice. God's stars were over us; but we had no other house nor home. We were wanderers now. The roof which I had built on the little manse sheltered others who had not toiled for it; and who, without cause, would have laughed at beholding us. Tears blinded me. My heart, my whole body ached. But I could not believe that God had thrown me away. In my clasp was a little hand; and, under the stars, a little, upturned face; and up to my heart fluttered a little voice:

"*My papa; my o-w-n, dear papa!*" it said.

BUILDING ANEW

CHAPTER IX

BUILDING ANEW

NATURE is kind. Three things are known unto it: We are not orphan children. We do not walk alone. It serves. "The angel heart of all" is the heart of *man*! To him who walks in darkness, it is most wonderfully kind.

Faithful friends, former parishioners in Red Bank, prevailed upon me at last, that it was best to let them care for my little son until such time as I should again be able to give him a comfortable home. Up to this time, I had taken him about with me, wherever I had gone. I now redoubled my efforts to secure employment. For a time, in New York, I tried newspaper work; but could not succeed very well there. Then I scrubbed floors and did other honest things; but I could find nothing permanent. I sold one poem to the editor of a syndicate, an old friend, but could sell no more. A mysterious *something* seemed always to defeat me, turn where I would. I appeared as an entertainer in white churches and halls. A Negro preacher happened to be present one evening. I saw him talking

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to the management; and I was given no more engagements. The manager of a vaudeville theatre offered to engage me for his circuit at forty dollars a week; but, being a minister, I could not accept *that*. Yet, though I had wronged no man, every pulpit in the world was, at least technically, closed to me at that time because of the ecclesiastical action and influences of the Church which I had served. Once, on a pitch-dark night, as I walked alone along a country road, seeking shelter and work, a rifle bullet whistled past my head. I stopped and investigated, as best I could, but never learned who fired the shot. I learned afterward that it was probably not unknown that I should pass along that road. The spot in which the shot was fired was nearly half a mile from any house. From behind a clump of bushes, in the direction from which the shot had come, I caught the sound of some one's running. I was not frightened, but walked back over the same road again that night, having been refused either work or shelter at the farm house whither I had gone.

Shall I tell of days of hunger, and of wandering; of nights spent under the open, wintry sky? Shall I tell of seeking work, and finding none? Shall I speak of rebuffs and buffetings; of "friends" who forgot, or who "passed by on the other side"? Shall I tell of anguish and of heart-break; of bitter, bitter days when *no* man understood, nor cared? Shall I

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tell of temptations overcome, when Anger spoke and flamed? Must I recount eclipses of faith?—Tell of one who, for bitter hunger, staggered, like a drunken man, through the streets of great cities, after a little boy had been safely placed in the hands of kind friends? No, no! these things are passed; and the morn has come for me! And the glory of God has risen upon me. “Truly, the light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun!” Only need *now* to bear witness of the light; to testify that none need despair.

Back in New York again, I borrowed a little money from my publishers who deducted the amount from the meagre returns from my book. When this sum was exhausted, I went to my publishers and asked for employment. I offered to read proof, manuscript, run the elevator or scrub the floors—*anything!* But they could not use my services. As for another book—that was out of the question just then, they said.

My side of the church matter had never been told in print, but another side had been diligently circulated. From coloured people in the South, strangers whom I had never seen, I received letters threatening my life. Yet the court had adjudged me innocent of the offence for which I was being persecuted.

Once, in New York, at the request of the Rev. Dr. W. H. Brooks, the pastor of St. Mark's M. E. church,

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I recited some verses of mine before an organisation of coloured ministers known as "The Interdenominational Ministers Alliance." I had had nothing to eat for two days, but no one knew or suspected it by my manner or words. The ministers applauded and complimented me. Dr. Brooks had introduced me kindly, with the words: "There's too much *in* this young man to allow him to be lost to the race."

I have always felt grateful to him for those words, spoken at a time when so many misunderstood me; and when, for aught I knew, he may himself have thought me the ingrate and traitor which gratuitous enemies had painted me. I did not tell him different. I did not burden him with my troubles. I did not declare my innocence before the ministers, nor mention my acquittal, though I had the chance. For there sat those of my former denomination, brothers with whom I had wrought in hallowed associations, to whom such a declaration would have been most embarrassing, since they, thinking, perhaps, that they were doing right, or else from pure cowardice, had acquiesced in the thing which was done. So, I said not a word, but went quietly away, hungry and without money, and with hardly where to lay my head, but grateful for the kind words which Dr. Brooks had spoken. That was years ago, but I *treasure* those words. They helped me to begin my fight anew for

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"a place in the sun," despite the efforts of powerful Negro churchmen to keep me down. Ah, *that* is the curse of the American Negro!—jealousy, silly bickering and inherent deviltry on the part of those who would *lead*! The *best* in the race is often near the bottom and the *worst* near the top. They find a sinister and incomprehensibly devilish delight in kicking every honest heart that knows a better way.

I found work at last as a janitor's assistant in Brooklyn. And loving toil was sweet. The old Scotchman—Stephenson—under whom I worked was a hard master, but he paid well. What if my hours were from five in the morning until nearly midnight? Labour was also *prayer*! How sweet, how delightful to pay money for my child once more; to send the little things he liked. How delightful, in the quiet of my tiny room, to browse through books again, during the "slack hours" between eight in the evening and "closing-up-time." And one might write, too, a little, and dream, betimes. I worked in this place several months.

Before coming to this place, I had joined a Baptist church as an ordinary member, being baptised by the Rev. Dr. J. C. Butler, the pastor of Bethesda Baptist church in Jersey City, N. J. Rev. Butler is one of the oldest and most respected coloured ministers in the North. His church is connected with a white Bap-

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tist association in which he is highly esteemed. He is a veteran churchbuilder, having erected seven Baptist churches during his nearly forty years in the ministry. An impregnable Gibraltar in character, there is in him the tenderness of a child. I shall always reverence this strong and venerable man. I had been introduced to him by a Baptist minister to whom I had once shown some little act of courtesy, but who then had no pastorate. It was night. Dr. Butler was sitting in the door of Bethesda church which he had just built, and of which he is still the pastor. We stated to Dr. Butler my desire to enter the Baptist denomination; and I frankly told him of the experience through which I had passed.

Dr. Butler was silent for a while. Then he asked me:

"You haven't *murdered* anybody, have you?"

"No," I said.

"Nor burned anybody's house?"

"No, Sir."

"Nor stolen anything; nor broken up anybody's family?"

"No, Sir."

"You don't use liquor nor tobacco? Have been a good husband and father; live decently; are a converted man; and was freed in court of the matter charged against you?"

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"Yes," I replied, "it is even so."

"Then I cannot *possibly* keep you out of my church," Dr. Butler concluded. "Why," he declared, "if you were a gambler or a murderer, and had found the peace of God, I *dare not* withhold from you the communion of the blessed Christ! You are welcome here, my brother."

And so I was baptised into the fellowship of Bethesda church, and into the faith in which my revered grandfather had reared me, and in which he had, in early life, been a sort of minister. But this did not take place until after the more bitter of my enemies, relentlessly dogging my steps, and determined to block my way, had protested to Dr. Butler that I was "a dangerous man" who should not be permitted to rise.

"He is more cunning than a fox; slyer than the devil; bolder than a lion, and more fascinating than sin!" they declared. "If you have him around here, he'll soon get your church," they warned.

"I *built* this church," said Dr. Butler, slowly, "at a great sacrifice, and my people *know* it. If this young man can steal my people's hearts away, then let him have them. But I do not believe he would do such a thing. He doesn't *look* like it. Nothing can move me from my determination to stand by the young man, in the spirit of Christ, whose I am."

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Strange! Nearly all of those who so cruelly persecuted me at that time are now either dead or disgraced. One is a raving maniac; one is a fugitive from justice; another is out of the ministry. I have never lifted my hand against one of them. The building which sheltered the press upon which many most untruthful things were printed against me burned to the ground a week after the edition of the paper which contained them appeared; and the press, falling through into the basement, was completely smashed. I was one thousand miles from the scene of the fire; did not know any one in that city, and had never visited the place in my life.

But the experience that hurt deepest in all this period of sadness was the loss of many little, treasured things, valuable only to the heart, and endeared by memory—things which money could not buy, nor any power replace:

Before I had found work as a janitor in Brooklyn, I had lodged for a little time in a private house on Eighteenth street, New York. Being a few dollars in arrears for room rent, I had voluntarily given up the room, leaving my trunk as security for the debt. When I returned for my trunk, with sorely-earned cash, it had mysteriously disappeared. The woman of the house told many strange yarns about it; but finally admitted that *some* one had given her money

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for the trunk. The realisation of my irreparable loss staggered me. In that trunk were valued manuscripts; pictures of friends, dead and living; there were letters from Frances E. Willard, Henry D. Lloyd, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Chas. W. Chestnutt, Wm. Dean Howells, Dr. Henry Van Dyke, Wm. Stanley Braithwaite, Richard Watson Gilder, Will Carleton and other well known people. The loss of these letters was, in a sense, a loss to the world. I have since received requests for permission to copy some of these letters, especially Miss Willard's and Mr. Lloyd's, from persons who were compiling their biographies. But, personally dearer to *me*, were the letters from my dead wife; and my little, dead baby's shoes and play-things which were in that trunk. Even my dead wife's coffin-plate, her picture, and every memory-endear'd token of the past had been blotted out *forever!* I reeled, like a drunken man, under the blow. I lifted up my voice and wept. But I did not strike back. *That* would not bring back my things. "I should have to give them up anyway, at *death*," I reasoned. "Henceforth I am so much *dead*. This is *God's* way, and it is best for *me*."

One Sabbath morning I was invited to preach in the coloured Baptist church in Yonkers, N. Y. And there I met Rosina B. Harvey, who afterwards be-

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came my wife. She was the organist of the church, a composer of music, and the daughter of the late Lee Roy Harvey of Washington, D. C., the first teacher of Captain Walter Loving, the leader of the famous Philippines Constabulary Band. In her I found truly a loyal and devoted helpmate. She comes of a family of musicians, one brother having been the musical director in the well-known theatrical production, "The South Before the War"; and, later, the leader of the Forty-eighth U. S. regimental band. Another brother leads an orchestra in Washington, and a sister, Mrs. Mariette Clinkscales, the wife of Attorney Clinkscales, is organist of one of Washington's large coloured churches. We have one son, Henry Harvey Carrothers.

Not long after my marriage to Miss Harvey, I fell heir to a small legacy through the death, in my old home in Michigan, of an uncle, John Ray. He was not a blood relation, but the husband of the aunt who had hidden me beside a great log in the forest, and covered me with leaves, one summer night during my strange boyhood. Between him and me there had always been a strong and tender tie. I had lived on the farm with my aunt and him for nearly two years, while Grandfather was not house-keeping, when I was quite a small boy. Having no blood relations, he had left his estate to me.

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The property consisted of several lots in the city of South Haven, two flocks of sheep, an insurance policy and various collateral securities, the estate amounting altogether, as I estimate it, to nearly \$8,000.00. But, before I arrived upon the scene, an executor had been appointed, and a number of claims had been filed against the estate. The matter dragged through the courts (where these claimants had placed it) for more than a year. All that I was finally given was a little less than half the face value of my uncle's insurance policy—\$225.00. Not a Negro received another cent from the John Ray estate. It all went mysteriously to Michigan white people.

My uncle had died suddenly. He had made a will, but it could not be produced. The whole community knew of his oft-repeated desire as to the disposition of his property. But, under the laws of Michigan, I, not being a blood relation, was required to prove that he had repeated his desire, verbally within twenty-four hours of his death. Failing this, the estate went to the Commonwealth or to claimants. The claimants got it all. They even attempted to collect on his life insurance policy which plainly bore my name, as beneficiary.

Before going West, I had decided to make South Haven my home, and to start again in life there; that whatever I received from my uncle's estate should

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be spent there, in the community where both he and I had lived; and that, whatever the decision of the court, I should not quarrel with my old friends and neighbours over the matter. So, I settled quietly down in the peace of the old town, among many who had been my boyhood's playmates and friends. As there was no coloured church within twenty-five miles of South Haven, I organised the Union Baptist church there; and, with a membership of but fourteen, bought a plot of ground 100 feet square; and, in eighteen months, had erected a neat church edifice valued at \$3500.00. It was to me a labour of love for the place where I was reared, and for my people there. There were seventy-two coloured people then living in or near South Haven. Only two or three of these ever attended the white churches. The rest went their way, absolutely without religious opportunity or training. Upon learning that I was a minister, they earnestly besought me to establish a church for them. I realised that no church could live out of the small number of coloured people there; but I believed that the establishment of a church would bring in others, especially in the summer season, when the city, which had become a popular mid-Western summer resort, was filled with its gay crowds of resorters. I believed that the white community would also help. And so I proceeded.

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I worked upon every part of the building; and, with the exception of \$1000.00 which we borrowed, solicited every dollar that went into the church, canvassing among the business men of the city; trudging up muddy country roads, and travelling, by boat and rail, in various directions, as far as Chicago, Kalamazoo, Hartford, Dowagiac, St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, Michigan. I also gave two Sabbaths in each month to the pastorate of a small coloured Baptist church in Dowagiac, Michigan, forty miles away. I put nearly all of my \$225.00 into the South Haven church. To support my family, I pitched hay, cut corn, canvassed for magazine subscriptions and helped farmers with their threshing. I also gave lectures and readings, and preached occasionally in white churches. I now tried literary work again: I sold a few poems to the *Criterion*; to the *Voica of the Negro* (then the leading coloured magazine), and to the Associated Sunday Magazines. My wife also taught music, having about thirty pupils, all of whom but two were white. There were no moments of discouragement; but, try as we might, there were times when cash was out, and the larder ran perilously low. I received no salary whatever from the South Haven church, and but \$8.00 a month from my Dowagiac congregation. And out of that my travelling expenses to and from Dowagiac had to be defrayed. And

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there were times when we had to share our own small store of food with our parishioners.

We lived continually by prayer.

One winter morning when the snow lay three feet deep upon the ground, and our last scanty morsel had been put aside for our children; when the rent was unpaid, and the last bit of fuel was in the stove, and there was no work to obtain, we knelt in prayer together, and asked God to help us, *in His own way*, for our *children's* sake. While we were yet upon our knees, the postman pounded upon the door, and a white letter fluttered in. It was from New York, and contained a check for \$20.00 and a letter from Wm. A. Taylor, then the editor of the Associated Sunday Magazines, saying:

"We are rather overcrowded at present with material, and particularly with poetry, but I am retaining this poem for the special reason that I want you to have representation in the magazine."

Strange! It was *five years* before that poem was used; and *then* I was pastoring a church in New England at the largest salary I have ever received.

One cold winter day I was working alone, digging the trenches for the foundation of my church with an old, broken shovel which I had found. There had been a blizzard. The snow was drifted five feet deep against the hill at the upper end of the church lot.



They earnestly besought me to establish a church for them. I worked upon every part of the building. The man in the foreground is myself.



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It was bitter cold. My trousers froze about my ankles. I could not obtain labourers to assist me because of the severe weather; but I thought the work should go forward. While I was busily digging at the frozen earth, an intelligent white farmer who had been to my house to get my opinion upon some literary matter came up. He was rather a stranger to me; a poet, and, by a strange antithesis, an agnostic. We talked for some time. As he turned to go, I said to him:

"When I get this church completed, you must come to it some time."

"All right," he replied, earnestly.

He went straight home, five miles, and secured the district school house, and arranged for Mrs. Corrothers and me to give an entertainment there for the benefit of our work. Then he saw to it that we had an overflowing audience. On the night of the entertainment, he drove up to our house in his big "bob-sled," and took our whole family out to his home to supper; and then to the school house. During an intermission, he presented me with the entire door proceeds and a *new shovel*, his personal gift, much to the amusement of the audience. We spent the night and the next forenoon as his guests; and when he took us back to town, he and his wife, a cultured, gracious woman, packed the sleigh with fruit and vegetables for our use. The affair was all a volun-

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tary kindness on the farmer-poet's part, and an entire surprise to us.

Our church was forty-seven feet by forty, with a basement under the entire building. The basement was constructed out of cement blocks; but the superstructure was frame. As the church neared completion, in the spring, I was working one day on the building. And as I worked, I sang, for the pure joy of the labour. A white deacon who passed by exclaimed:

"Well, you seem to be happy!"

"Yes," I replied, "I am."

"You pray some, I presume?"

"Yes," I admitted, "I do."

"You must, for this building is almost a miracle," he declared. "I presume you ask God for just what you desire."

"No," I said, "I don't. God *knows* my will. What I pray for is to learn *His* will, so that I may conform my will to His."

I had not been mistaken in my idea that our religious enterprise would bring more coloured people into South Haven. When it was known that a coloured church was assured, new families moved in. A syndicate of coloured business men from Chicago and St. Louis secured an option on an abandoned white resort on the lake front, with a view to establishing

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a coloured summer resort. Bitter opposition to this plan developed among a certain element of white newcomers, and the local papers were bombarded with violent protests. The impression soon got abroad that Negroes were not wanted in that community. The resort project fell through. No coloured visitors came, but a number of coloured people left. Our parish, I saw, would have no chance to prosper. To remain longer in that place would be a waste of time. All my work had been in vain!

But I refused to die.

We went from South Haven to Dowagiac, and from there on to Washington, D. C., where I was duly ordained. (For all this time, I had been merely a licensed Baptist preacher). In Washington my wife became organist of a large coloured church, while I became the Assistant Secretary of the Educational Board of the National Baptist Convention, under Dr. D. S. Klew. In a few months, through the influence of Dr. W. Bishop Johnson of Washington, then my pastor, I was called to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Lexington, Va. This was the town in which my grandfather was born; and in which, when a young man, he had preached to his father's coloured people, a few of whom still lived, and were in my congregation.

Lexington is a little, mountain city, picturesquely

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situated near the head of the Shenandoah valley. It is the seat of two important educational institutions, "The Washington and Lee University" and "The Virginia Military Institute." It will be forever an American shrine, for it holds the ashes of Robert E. Lee and of "Stonewall" Jackson.

Our church edifice in Lexington was a beautiful brick and stone structure costing \$30,000.00, and seating 1200 people. It was heated by steam and lighted by electricity. It paid a salary of \$650.00 a year. I still have many warm personal friends in Lexington, among my own people; and among the white people there are many whom I remember with gratitude. For, surely, there were never any better white people on the face of the earth!

Almost unconsciously, now, I had retaken much ground in the hearts of many good men in my race. As tending to confirm this, and not as a matter of intentional egotism, I wish to set down here excerpts from letters which were sent to the Lexington church without my knowledge:

The first is from Dr. W. Bishop Johnson:

"I want to say to the officers of the church that Rev. Corrothers is a rare combination: A man of many excellent parts; an untiring worker and a prince of money-raisers. It is because of his all-round qualities that I have recommended him to you, of course not ignoring his christianity and sanc-

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tified common sense. I persuaded him to come South, after I had watched him succeed under the most discouraging circumstances; after I had seen Christ in him. I made up my mind to bring him to a place where he would meet more of our race, and where his gifts and graces would help him to win more for the Master. You will have a great Bible student and teacher, and a preacher whom you will like to hear more and more, if you call him to your pulpit."

The following is from the Rev. Dr. M. W. D. Norman, pastor of the Metropolitan Baptist church, Washington, D. C.:

"It gives me very great pleasure to bear testimony to the high Christian character of Rev. J. D. Corrothers whom I have known for some time. He is an able, conscientious and scholarly minister of the gospel; an honest and worthy christian man, alive to the needs of his race and church; in fine, a man whose character is uniformly of the highest order, and whose talents and ability entitle him to the most favorable consideration."

From the Baptist Ministers' Union of Washington the following was sent:

"Rev. James D. Corrothers is a member of the Baptist Ministers' Union of the District of Columbia and Vicinity, and is held in high esteem by his brethren as an intellectual and moral exponent of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, should be a help wherever his lot is cast."

Upon my retirement from the Lexington church, my congregation presented my family and me with

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several gifts of value toward which white friends, also, had contributed. And a number of white business men generously and voluntarily gave me written testimonials as to my business transactions with them. I set them down as tending to show that there are plenty of Southern white people who appreciate and encourage what is best in the Negro; and, to a surprising degree, take pleasure in speaking generously of him. It may be all the more surprising, too, since they knew me to be a Negro of Northern birth and rearing. I select the following letter from Mr. T. H. Boley, a general merchant in Lexington:

"It gives me great pleasure to state that the Rev. Jas. D. Corrothers has been a good customer of mine, and I regret he now leaves our town. During his sojourn here our relations have been most satisfactory in every way; and I regret he leaves very much indeed. I consider him a man worthy of anything he may ask."

The following is from Mr. J. McD. Adair, the leading dry goods merchant in Lexington, and an aristocratic gentleman of the old school:

"This is to certify that Rev. J. D. Corrothers ran an account with me while here; that he paid me up all right, and acted in every way as became an honourable and high-toned minister of the gospel, and Christian gentleman."

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This letter is from Davidson Brothers, dealers in wood, coal and hay:

"We have had an account on our ledger against Rev. J. D. Corrothers, and have found his payments as prompt and his dealings as fair and honourable as any account we have on our ledger, which amounts to five hundred or more."

Among the generous things my church said of me was:

"We have found Dr. Corrothers to be an able and scholarly pulpit orator; and he leaves us, as he came, without a stain upon his Christian character."

From Lexington we returned to Washington. We were in Washington when the celebrated Brownsville affair occurred, when 167 U. S. coloured soldiers were discharged "without honour" for their alleged "shooting up" of Brownsville, Texas. Mrs. Corrothers and I sat in the crowded senate gallery when Foraker made his eloquent speech in behalf of the discharged men, on April 14, 1908, when he shouted: "They ask no favours because they are Negroes, but justice because they are men!" We heard Senator Tillman, the supposed irreconcilable enemy of the race, when he hotly declared in the senate: "I plant my feet on the bed-rock principle that no man is guilty until he is proven guilty!"

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In the basement of the capitol, I talked with brave Sergeant Mingo Sanders, one of the discharged men, a veteran of many battles, who was admittedly in no way culpable, and who had served in the U. S. army twenty-six years without having had a single mark set down against him. I talked with Ferguson, and with other of the discharged soldiers; and I found them a very sad lot of men, protesting to a man their innocence of any participation or knowledge of the thing alleged against them. Most of these men had been so long in the U. S. service that they felt lost out of it. They were excellent soldiers, but were unused to the hurly-burly of modern civilian life. They knew not where to turn, nor what to do. From the depth of my heart I pitied them and felt grateful to Foraker whom I had always warmly admired. I wrote a poem in his honour which was printed in the *Washington Star*, and afterwards illustrated and reprinted in folio form. I forwarded a copy to Foraker, then in retirement in Cincinnati. Mr. Foraker sent with his reply an autographed photograph of himself. His letter is cordial and interesting:

"CINCINNATI, O., April 28, 1909.

Rev. James D. Corrothers, D.D., *Washington, D. C.*

DEAR SIR:

On my return here to-day, your letter was brought to my attention. I thank you for its kind expressions; also for

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the poem you inclose. It is much appreciated. I would say more about it, if it did not have very much direct reference to myself. I have read with much interest that you formerly lived in Springfield, Ohio, and of your meeting me at that time. I hope when I am next in Washington I may have the pleasure of meeting you.

Very truly yours, etc.,

J. B. FORAKER."

A part of my Foraker poem went:

"On that hot, barbed hill in Cuba,
Where the Spaniards blocked the way,
At San Juan, when brave men faltered,
Our black soldiers saved the day.
They were men like Mingo Sanders,
Heroes of the camp and fight.
Were they cowards down in Brownsville?
Dread marauders of the night?
Veterans bathed in holy battle,
Where dark Lethe rolled in sight!

"Who are these dark peoples, Saxons,
Dwelling 'mongst you, humbled so?
Children of the warrior nations
Whom Omnipotence brought low!
God, the Alpha and Omega,
Brings the boasters still to naught.
Blest, O blessed are the meek ones
Who His sable robes have caught!
Hark! The ancients whisper through us
To the Present, mystery-fraught.

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"White Senator, put off the cares of State.

Rest, Friend of Truth, known of the gods above.

The storms broke over thee, but found thee great,

Though Time, white Time, had touched thee with his snow.

To thy grand rest, like Cincinnatus, go,

With honours, and with all our grateful love."

From a number of leading coloured men in various parts of the country I received the kindest of letters about the poem, among others, one from Chas. W. Chestnutt, the well-known novelist of Cleveland, with whom I had corresponded, intermittently, for years, and whom I greatly admire both as a man and a writer. I regret exceedingly that I am unable at present to lay my hand upon Mr. Chestnutt's letter. In its stead, I may be pardoned, I trust, for any seeming love of praise in quoting the following letter from the Rev. Bernard Tyerrell, A.M., of Lynchburg, Va.:

"The poem savours of a breadth of culture and treatment that destines a recognition of the good writers of our race. You could have chosen no better subject. Beyond all disputation, Mr. Foraker is a most unique character of the times. Like Clay, he would rather be right than president; like Cæsar, he would spurn a crown proffered him at the expense of his manhood; and, with the lowly Nazarean, he has descended to espouse the cause of the lowly, despising the shame. Such a man cannot successfully be dropped from the epoch-making of a high-toned civilisation. You have placed a song on the lips of Posterity to sing his praise."

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The *Springfield* (Mass.) *Republican* also referred to the poem as "a most enviable eulogy by a Negro poet."

When I first joined the Baptist church, and when many doors seemed closed to me, the *Republican* had printed a number of my poems, notably a Negro dialect poem entitled, "Driftwood." This poem attracted the attention of Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox who wrote me an encouraging and beautiful letter (which I deeply regret my inability to find), and caused my poem to be copied, with due credit to the *Republican*, by the entire chain of papers controlled by Mr. Wm. Randolph Hearst. Perhaps an idea of the poem may be desired. I give the first stanza:

"De drif'-wood drif's down de ribber wid de tide,
Er lodges on de bank, along de ribber side.
But de steamboat splutters an' splashes up de stream,
A-puffin' an' a-poundin' an' a-blowin' uv huh steam.
De white folks is lak steamboats, steerin' whah dey please
Along Life's happy ribber, in dey swif'ness an' pride;
But de dahky is mo' often lak de drif'wood you sees—
A-floatin', floatin', floatin' wid de tide."

Sometime after we returned to Washington, I was called to the pastorate of a large congregation known as "The Little Zion Baptist Church" (in honour of an older church in Washington) in Westmoreland county, Va., where George Washington was born. It

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was the loveliest Baptist church I have ever pastored. Besides its main edifice, it owns also two chapels, located respectively three and ten miles from the church. Its members are scattered over an area of twenty-one miles. Not a cross word was spoken by a single member while I was pastor there. I made a very great mistake in leaving this large and delightful field to accept a call to New England.

While pastor of this large Virginia church, I lived in Washington. It is customary for rural coloured churches in the South to hold services on but two Sundays in each month, so that I had two full weeks to myself in Washington, where I preached in the leading pulpits and taught theology and sacred oratory in the Wilbanks Institute. A member of my church in Westmoreland county, a Miss Russ, a school teacher, lent me a copy of Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads" which she had observed I was fond of reading. The beauty of Swinburne's verse was a revelation to me. It taught me new possibilities and delights in verse-making. The beauty, fervour and fire; the divinely sad music, the mystery and masterfulness of Swinburne's beautiful poetry enthralled and enraptured me. Trees became my teachers, and the winds spoke to me. I strung my harp anew, and began singing in the pure joy of things. I had taken new lessons in the art of

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making verse; lessons upon lessons from the poetry of Swinburne!

One night I arose from my bed in the farm house where I was staying, and began to write of Dunbar, of *my* Dunbar, *my* poet, *my friend*. I had been thinking of him for days. I seemed almost to commune with his beautiful spirit. With wet cheeks and streaming eyes, I wrote, until far into the night, what I meant to be a *poet's* poem *to* a poet, as unto his very spirit. Twelve stanzas in sonnet form I wrote to the memory of my friend. Then, for some days afterward, I rewrote and wrought lovingly upon it. And then I did a rash thing: I sent it to the editor of *Harper's Magazine*! About two weeks afterward it was returned, but with a letter in the editor's handwriting, so beautiful, so touching and encouraging that it filled me with gratitude and hope. Inasmuch as I had never seen nor heard of the editor who had written me so kindly (though I afterwards learned that he was the Editor-in-Chief), it inspired me with the belief that there were still possibilities for me in literature. His letter follows:

"Jan. 23, 1911.

Editorial Rooms, Harper's Magazine.

HARPER & BROTHERS,
Franklin Square, New York.

DEAR MR. CORROTHERS:

I sincerely regret that I am unable to use in our maga-

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zine your noble and beautiful tribute to the poet Dunbar. Apart from the fact that we exclude all articles and poems of a tributary character, the length of the poem makes it impossible for us. I am returning it to you herewith, but I cannot do so without expressing to you my sense of its wonderful beauty and imaginative power.

Yours faithfully,

H. M. ALDEN."

I now sent the poem to the *Century*, in which nothing of mine had appeared for ten years; and from that most charitable of editors, Robert Underwood Johnson, then a *new* editor to me, came a note saying:

"*Dear Mr. Corrothers:*

I should enjoy publishing this tribute of yours to Dunbar were it not so extreme in its eulogy and so long. It has fine streaks of poetry, and does credit to your heart. The first two stanzas are the best.

I thank you cordially.

Sincerely yours,

R. U. JOHNSON."

It was a refusal; but so kind and considerate that I was delighted with it. I read every word of it over and over; and *studied* it. And then there came a gleam of hope—a flash of intelligence actually glimmered across my bedarkened "grey matter"! Those "*first two stanzas*"! He should *have* them. I cut them off and returned them to him.

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Then, with infinite patience and charity, he marked what displeased him in the lines, and sent them back. For two years, at various times, I worked over these and another sonnet, "The Negro Singer," writing, re-writing and interlining; changing and correcting this and that. I wrote one line in seventy-six different ways, and spent five weeks on three and one-half lines in the octave of "The Negro Singer." I considered that I was making a new start in literature; and that I was working for my *race*, as well as for myself and family. In addition to this, I was doing a higher class of work than I had ever done before, my other published literary efforts having been almost exclusively in Negro dialect, while this was not. It was a complete changing of styles for me, and therefore hard work. I felt that I had mastered Negro dialect; but I was far from having mastered the art of expressing worthy thoughts in literary English. Besides, I moved in an element of society which, for the most part, did not use good English. Hence, my work was doubly hard. But it was accepted finally, after assiduous labour; and I received in payment a check for \$30.00—a little more than seventy cents a line. I was then pastoring a church in Haverhill, Mass., having changed fields during the time which had intervened since the beginning of my correspondence with Mr. Johnson. The *Century* has taken from

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me since then four other poems: "At the Closed Gate of Justice," "The Dream and the Song," "The Plaint of the Sorehead" and "An Indignation Dinner." The last two pieces are in Negro dialect, the last having appeared in the Christmas magazine of 1915.

Besides these poems in the *Century*, a number of my poems and stories have appeared in the *Crisis*, a splendid magazine published in New York by "The Society for the Advancement of Coloured People," and edited by the scholarly Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, the author of "The Souls of Black Folk" and "The Quest of the Silver Fleece." The *Southern Workman*, published at Hampton Institute, the *Book News Monthly*, the *Boston Transcript*, the *American Press Association*, the *Philadelphia Record* and the *Philadelphia Press*, the *Springfield Republican*, *Boston Post*, *American Magazine* and the *Associated Sunday Magazines* have all printed my work within a recent period. In the *Associated Sunday Magazines*, a sketch which I recently wrote about Dr. C. Albert Tindley, a coloured hymn-writer and minister of Philadelphia, attracted considerable attention, 1,000 extra copies of the edition of the *Press*, containing the magazine in Philadelphia, being printed to supply Dr. Tindley's friends. For this sketch I received \$35.00. The *American Magazine* for March, 1914, contained a story of mine, "At the End of the Controversy," which was illustrated by

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Frank E. Schoonover. I was paid \$100.00 for this story, and was requested by the editor to furnish him with some autobiographical facts which were printed with the story. The *American Magazine* has now in hand a poem entitled "The Shadow on a Race," for which it paid me \$20.00. I have never seen a single editor for whom I now write, except Dr. Du Bois, though I had the pleasure, some sixteen years ago, of meeting the late Richard Watson Gilder, then the editor of the *Century*. It is generally known to editors, of course, that I am coloured. In the *Etude*, a musical magazine published by The Presser Co. in Philadelphia, some verses of mine, entitled "Mammy's Growin' Ole," appeared recently, having been set to music by Geo. Noyes Rockwell, a white musician and composer who lives in Chicago, an entire stranger to me. The appearance of my verses as a song was a complete surprise to me. They originally appeared in the *Southern Workman* fifteen years ago.

The *New York Evening Post* said of my recent story in the March number of the *American Magazine*:

"In a fine number of the *American* we are led to single out James D. Corrothers's 'At the End of the Controversy,' a semi-fact story, as the outstanding feature. It is to the credit of the *American* that once every so often it gives us a bit of writing of this kind—a bit of the idealism and tragedy of

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life, courageous in its out-spoken humanity and actual for the problems of the day. 'At the End of the Controversy' reminds one easily of Mr. Copley's 'The Impeachment of President Israel.' The author, Mr. Corrothers, is of Negro blood, and the story concerns his own people in a New England setting."

Somehow, New England rather disappointed me. My opinion of it may have been too idealistic. To me it was symbolic of the Puritan and Pilgrim; it was the home of the poets and of far-visioned reformers, lineal descendants of the Puritan impulse. I did not expect to find its inhabitants common clay like other men; but rather more idealistically influenced by the lofty patriotism and ideals of the noble men and women who have immortalised New England. Most of all was I unprepared to find, as I did, radiating from its great manufacturing centres, a large and assertive foreign population which has not caught New England's fine spirit, nor imbibed any other than the coarser Americanisms which one picks up in the streets. They have not, for the most part, even so much as heard of Whittier or Emerson, but they were able gratuitously to inform me, with profane emphasis, that I was "a *nigger*!" And they were jolly well up on strikes! Into this land of plenitude they have brought—*themselves*. They have changed, and will change still more. But it is not unreasonable to sup-

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pose that they will also *change us*. Is not the beginning of this already apparent? And even *in New England!*

But the New England Negro was the greatest disappointment to me! Though there are many splendid examples of individual character and business acumen among the coloured people of New England, the New England Negro, taken as a whole, seems to set almost no value upon the unusual advantages which New England affords. Many are merely transplanted Southern "ne'er-do-wells" who do not represent the best in their race; but, too often, the reverse. I was glad to resign, and to get away from among them where pastoring among coloured Baptists, at least, is one long nightmare of fuss-dodging.

